

# Abbott Furnace Journey to Become Lean Champions

Abbott Furnace, a manufacturer of industrial sintering furnaces, was looking for change on their production floor. As with many manufacturers today, they wanted to increase efficiencies with the goal of reducing costs and increasing profits. Abbott's Inventory Control Specialist, Susan Williams, shared with the Northwest Industrial Resource Center (NWIRC) the company's needs and previous initiatives that didn't net results they were hoping to achieve. Because a major roadblock in the past was "acceptance of change", NWIRC recommended providing a Lean Champion Certification Course with a twist... hosting the training onsite at Abbott Furnace opposed to the classroom. They engaged an affiliate partner, Vie Associates' Lean and Continuous Improvement Consultant, Craig Corsi, to conduct the program.

As part of the curriculum, Williams and Abbott's Carl Mohny, were led through two lean continuous improvement projects specific for their company. Value Stream Mapping was applied to their capital equipment product line to identify opportunities to reduce lead times, improve product flow, and worker productivity. A Kaizen event was then conducted on their Plate Inventory to assist in improving accuracy, traceability, and reduce scrap and inventory costs. Providing this training onsite enabled hands-on implementation and the ability to train other employees, which otherwise doesn't occur with



Susan Williams and Carl Mohny, Lean Champions at Abbott Furnace.

classroom training. From the project work conducted, the company identified additional opportunities to increase capacity and improve worker productivity in specific areas. "Our company chose to take advantage of lean certification training onsite opposed to attending public classroom sessions to allow us to absorb lean tools in greater depth and empower our employees to apply lean principles to real life projects. On-site training gave us the advantage of including an ample number of employees in on the action," said Williams. "We were able to achieve change even while we were learning. I believe our decision to embrace lean principles will prove invaluable in the years to come," she said. Abbott's biggest takeaway from the program was cited as opening the opportunity for overall improvement and improved flow of employees, production, and efficiency.



Top: Industrial sintering furnace at Abbott.  
Bottom: Sam Glatt, Senior Designer at Abbott.

Abbott Furnace, located in St Marys, PA, was established in 1982 as a manufacturing and service company for control panels and in 1986 manufactured their first continuous belt furnace for the heat treat industry. They have expanded into other industries, including furnaces for powdered metal, annealing, brazing, thick film processing, glass to metal seal, and fuel cells. They employ 80+ skilled and salaried employees in a modern 70,000 square foot facility.

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## Successes & Highlights