

Great Lakes Wind Network Links Suppliers, Turbine Manufacturers

In the midst of a recession, one Cleveland manufacturer is hiring. Swiger Coil Systems – a Cleveland-based manufacturer of wind turbine generators – has added \$1.8 million in capital spending and 79 new employees in the past 18 months, and it expects to hire another 30 people this year.

Driving this growth is an explosive demand for wind turbine components. Like many others in Northeast Ohio, the company got its introduction to the wind industry from WIRE-Net's Great Lakes Wind Network (GLWN).

GLWN was launched in early 2007 with an initial grant from The Kent H. Smith Charitable Trust. That support led to more from The Cleveland Foundation, Burton D. Morgan Foundation, The Generation Foundation and others. All saw GLWN building a new industry sector that would stimulate new investment and job growth, while meeting the industry's demand for precision components for North America's growing wind market.

GLWN set out to establish itself as a global expert in wind supply chain development, believing that NEO can become a magnet for the wind industry. In some ways, that's exactly what is happening. The group has gained international recognition for its capacity to assess and connect the world's leading original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) with the region's component manufacturers.

"We are highly focused and have a network with over 600 manufacturers spanning fourteen states and Canada, said. Ed Weston, GLWN Director. "We have built relationships with most European, Asian, and American wind turbine manufacturers (OEM) including Vestas (Denmark), General Electric (US), Suzlon (India), Clipper Windpower (US) and Nordex (GE). Our job is to understand their critical requirements and serve as components head hunters. We save them time by providing pre-qualified supply chain connections."

The Network offers OEMs varying degrees of support, ranging from conducting individual component searches to sourcing entire nacelle (the "golf ball" on the top of the turbine tower, which houses the mechanical and electrical components of the turbine) assemblies. GLWN makes individual company referrals and orchestrates multi-day supply chain events during which GLWN may schedule as many as twenty manufacturers for individual meetings with visiting OEM supply chain managers based on specific criteria.

"To our knowledge, GLWN is unique," Weston says. No other organization combines technical expertise, connections into the world's leading wind turbine OEMs, and access to the hundreds of excellent suppliers throughout America's manufacturing belt to increase the rate of domestic content to North America's wind turbines. We're proud of that."

According to John Colm, WIRE-Net President and Executive Director, and the driving force behind this new markets initiative, roughly 500 of Ohio's potential wind energy supply chain firms are located in NEO's 13 counties, with approximately 10% of these located in Cuyahoga County. This new market aligns with NEO's manufacturing base. The region's skilled workforce, strong university-based research community, capacity to produce precision components, and long history in the metals industry combined to give GLWN an auspicious start.

In a \$ 7.8 billion market that the US Department of Energy expects to increase by double digits each year for the next twenty, NEO companies can thrive, Colm believes.

“America could have twice the wind business that we do today if it could expand its domestic wind manufacturing capacity—and that’s our goal,” Weston said.

Swiger Coil isn’t the only company seeing wind as a strong force in their future. Rotek, Inc. recently announced an \$82 million investment at its Aurora, Ohio facility to serve its own expanding large diameter slewing ring production and help meet the growing demands in the United States for seamless rolled rings. The expansion will create 150 new full-time jobs within three years and retain the 215 existing full-time jobs. Kalt Manufacturing in Lorain County announced a \$3.3 million project that will create 22 new jobs and plans to add space and equipment to allow for the growth of its wind business. Cardinal Fastener & Specialty Co., Inc. in Bedford Heights, which in January hosted Barack Obama, has also benefited from growth in this industry. “If anyone doubts that we can dig ourselves out of this hole,” the president-elect exclaimed, “I invite them here to look at Cardinal Fastener.” The company expects to add 20 new jobs to meet the increasing demand for its fasteners from wind turbine manufacturers.