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CIRAS: A Strategic Asset in Workforce Management

While language classes are not among the range of services CIRAS offers, its guidance on workforce strategies inspired Jake Oakland, president of Percival Scientific in Perry, to learn Spanish.

It is part of an effort to connect with Percival employees and the larger Perry community, where individuals of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin account for nearly a third of the city's population. CIRAS is assisting Percival with workforce planning, focusing on inclusive recruitment and retention practices for a diverse talent pool.

Percival is among a growing number of manufacturers across Iowa that realize the need to take action to address their workforce challenges. "Iowa's population growth, especially in rural areas, is not keeping pace with business needs," said Brenda Martin, CIRAS workforce services director.

Martin explained, "Demographic trends challenge businesses, with baby boomer retirements intensifying this. A multifaceted approach is needed. Companies must develop strategies to retain employees past age 65 and tap into the talent pipeline early—not just high school seniors."

Jake Oakland, president and CEO of Percival Scientific, and employee Alvaro Perez Cortes inspect a fabricated component to ensure proper fitting.

Continued on page 2

Since 1963, we have delivered proven services to enhance the performance of industry. Our approach—Engage. Educate. Embed.—creates specific solutions that allow each business and its community to prosper and grow.

CIRAS PARTNERS

- Iowa State University
 - Center for Crops Utilization Research
 - Center for Nondestructive Evaluation
 - College of Engineering
 - Department of Economics
 - Department of Environmental Health and Safety
 - Engineering Career Services
 - Extension and Outreach
 - Iowa Grain Quality Initiative
 - Meat Science Extension
 - Polymer and Food Protection Consortium
 - Structural Engineering Research Laboratory
- Alliant Energy
- Community Colleges for Iowa
- Iowa Area Development Group
- Iowa Association of Business and Industry
- Iowa Department of Transportation
- Iowa Economic Development Authority
- Iowa Farm Bureau
- Iowa Sustainable Business Forum
- Quad Cities Chamber

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Building Intercultural Skills

Mayra Ramirez, a CIRAS project manager, worked with Percival's leadership to develop a strategy to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to thrive at Percival. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development also supported the project.

"I have a general belief that diversity is an advantage," said Oakland. "We have Hispanic representation, but we have opportunities to improve. One opportunity was to get more involved in Perry. We want our brand out in the community."

Oakland has established a connection with Perry's Hispanics United Group and plans for a member of the Percival staff to join the organization.

"You want people to understand who you are in your community, beyond just that building they drive by every day," said Martin, "Don't be a mystery, but be a place that people think would be a great place for their kids to work someday."

Working with Ramirez, Percival conducted an intercultural awareness leadership training program and plans to offer the program to the rest of the company's staff.

The company is also exploring Spanish translations for training and HR materials.

"Working with CIRAS has helped us evaluate how we support a diverse

workforce," Oakland said. "I am trying to learn Spanish and make it a point to speak some Spanish to employees who I know are bilingual. I hope it shows that we are open-minded and supportive."

HR Focus

In early-stage businesses, one major challenge is taking the leap to build formal HR capabilities. Though Brandon Dahms' expertise is in business management and international marketing, he recently added human resources manager to his responsibilities.

"Any questions our employees have usually come to me," said Dahms, owner and sales manager for Innovative Manufacturing & Engineering in Des Moines. "It makes sense as a small, growing company we have someone in an HR role."

Currently, the company has eight employees, but Innovative Manufacturing & Engineering is growing and expects to double its workforce over the next three years.

With assistance from CIRAS, Dahms improved human resources processes, introducing an onboarding checklist and updating the employee handbook to support new hires in reaching milestones.

"Coaching helped me learn to create a priority list. Before this, we just threw stuff at the wall to see what stuck. We did not have much direction," Dahms said. "We now have a consistent process."



Deana Sheehy instructs Jaymie McKee on how to interpret an engineering diagram prior to building a product at Percival Scientific.

PERCIVAL SCIENTIFIC, INC.

FOUNDED: 1886 | **EMPLOYEES:** 86

OVERVIEW: Manufactures innovative research and special application-controlled environment chambers.

IMPACT: Developed and deployed strategy to better engage workforce.



Printed on
Recycled Paper



Left: Brandon Dahms, partner and sales manager for Innovative Manufacturing & Engineering, goes over onboarding documents with an employee. **Right:** Employees at Innovative Manufacturing & Engineering review production plans.



Building the Technical Talent Pipeline

Jeff Goodwin, president of JEDA Polymers in Dyersville, wanted a student intern to help set up an inventory tracking system. He started looking for an industrial engineering student. While waiting for a response, CIRAS helped him rethink the details.

Ramirez suggested expanding the search to encompass all engineering and business students, increasing the applicant pool. CIRAS also helped JEDA develop a more detailed job posting, interview questions, and a candidate evaluation matrix. Ramirez even assisted in finding housing and helped JEDA secure a grant through the Iowa Student Internship Program, funded by Iowa Workforce Development. Goodwin eventually hired a supply chain management student.

In a workforce-constrained operation, it is critical to make sure that your employees have the tools to do their work efficiently. JEDA was concerned that they did not have enough spare parts to support their team operations. "We have a good handle

on raw materials but not spare parts and maintenance items. If something breaks down, it can cause downtime that costs a lot of money," he said.

Collaborating with Emily Betz, CIRAS project manager, JEDA implemented a Kanban inventory system, including an instruction manual.

"Mayra helped me considerably with this process," Goodwin said. "I don't think I could have done it without her."

In a workforce-constrained world, businesses need to rethink details that have become a standard to open recruiting pools, improve new-hire and long-term retention, and develop leaders. Strategic adjustments to how things are done can make a substantial difference.

"We want our clients to work toward being an employer of choice," said Martin. "It's hard, and we're here to help companies be more strategic."

For more information, contact Brenda Martin at bkmartin@iastate.edu or 515-570-5282.

INNOVATIVE MANUFACTURING & ENGINEERING INC.

FOUNDED: 2003 | **EMPLOYEES:** 8

OVERVIEW: Manufactures precision-engineered parts through CNC machining.

IMPACT: Implemented foundational HR processes.

JEDA POLYMERS, LLC

FOUNDED: 2007 | **EMPLOYEES:** 17

OVERVIEW: Produces engineered resins.

IMPACT: Successfully hired first summer intern.

2023–2024 IOWA MANUFACTURING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The 2023–2024 Iowa Manufacturing Needs Assessment, conducted by CIRAS, reflects insights gathered from 220 Iowa manufacturers, supplemented by follow-on forums with key players across the manufacturing ecosystem.

The top needs identified are the following:

Profitability Challenges—More than half of the surveyed manufacturers report a return on sales (ROS) under 10%, indicating a compression in profitability.

Shift in Growth Inhibitors—There was a notable improvement in previously identified growth inhibitors, with hourly workforce availability now emerging as the principal barrier for the first time in survey history.

Salaried Technical Workforce

Shortage—There is increasing difficulty in hiring salaried technical staff, particularly in rural areas, which is impacting operations.

Technology Advancement—Indicators point to a continued acceleration in the adoption of new technologies within manufacturing processes.

Innovative Scheduling—New scheduling strategies for production employees are gaining traction and adding value.

Revival of Productivity Systems

Productivity improvement systems, such as Lean methods, are reemerging as solutions to address workforce shortages and the rapid pace of industry changes.

For more information, contact Mike O'Donnell at modonnll@iastate.edu or 515-509-4379.

To view the report: <https://go.iastate.edu/2H5LCG>



Predictive Maintenance Saves Big in Lost Production Costs

For Leo Avila, maintenance manager at Prairie Farms Dairy in Dubuque, it is not a matter of if, but when, critical equipment stops functioning and how many dollars are lost.



Avila is responsible for running the multimillion-dollar dairy co-op facility that operates 24 hours per day. Inevitably, one of the hundreds of machines at the facility will experience a critical malfunction.

Recently, it was a motor in one of the milk homogenizer processing lines. “It just quit,” Avila recalls. “I got the call at midnight, and we worked nonstop to fix it by 4 p.m. the next day. We lost 16 hours of production, about 20% of that day’s production, translating into about \$60,000.”

Avila knew there had to be a better way. Twenty years ago, at a conference, he heard about “predictive maintenance,” in which sensors monitor critical machinery and issue alerts about potential problems.

Predictive maintenance has its roots in the post-World War II technology boom, but for decades it was not widely available and was prohibitively expensive. At a recent CIRAS event, Avila learned how simple sensor technologies could be used as part of a predictive maintenance program for key equipment.

Avila explored sensor systems for machine monitoring. Most lower-cost systems provide periodic performance snapshots. However, Avila sought a system that provided continuous data monitoring.

Before turning to CIRAS, the only way Avila believed Prairie Farms could test equipment was to invest in purchasing.

Kirk Haaland, CIRAS project manager, helped Avila rethink ways to reduce the risks of this approach to evaluate their sensor needs and examine the machines.

“Costs for machine shutdowns lasting for hours could run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Implementing this equipment would help prevent those unexpected failures to avoid that cost,” Haaland says.

“Kirk helped us see the potential benefits for our machines,” Avila says. “CIRAS provided us with visionary knowledge.”

CIRAS led a two-week sensor pilot at Prairie Farms Dairy to help them evaluate the benefits and mitigate investment risks of technology adoption.

Prairie Farms is now planning to invest \$35,000 in a sensor system. It would take only one incident, like the homogenizer’s failure, to recoup those costs.

“We are so thankful for all the help we got from CIRAS,” Avila says. “We had no idea this sensor pilot program was out there for companies to use.”

For more information, contact Kirk Haaland at khaaland@iastate.edu or 515-520-7623.

“Kirk helped us see the potential benefits for our machines. CIRAS provided us with visionary knowledge.”



Above left: Dairy producer checking milking machine.
Above: Dairy cows with a gallon of produced milk.

PRAIRIE FARMS OF DUBUQUE

FOUNDED: 1938 | **EMPLOYEES:** 205 in Dubuque; 5,700 nationally

OVERVIEW: Part of Prairie Farms cooperative with 52 plants throughout the Midwest producing a range of dairy products.

IMPACT: Costs avoided of up to \$400,000 per day of production loss.

CIRAS Partner

Provides Industry Access to Premier Packaging Expertise

When a food industry client of Multi Packaging and Printing was having trouble with bags of cheese bursting, the Newton-based company turned to CIRAS, which had the perfect resource to address the problem: the Polymer and Food Protection Consortium (PFPC).

Some Multi Packaging and Printing bags burst after being filled with cheese, sealed, and dropped 20 feet into a tote. A PFPC team researched the bags and recommended adjustments to the manufacturing process to ensure that sufficient adhesive and heat were applied. The solution helped retain a valued customer, said Franchette Braaksma, president of Multi Packaging and Printing.

"We can take our product directly to the consortium," Braaksma said. "Being able to be there and relay to them what our customer tells us is a real benefit."

"Iowa manufacturers currently make up about 38% of our membership base and have submitted about 72% of projects completed to date," said Keith Vorst, consortium director and associate professor of food science and human nutrition. "Companies with a manufacturing presence in Iowa utilize our testing capabilities more often than the non-Iowa companies."

PFPC has evolved into a premier packaging research institute. Its world-class research facility at Iowa State has ten labs, including analytical labs, manufacturing labs, and state-of-the-art technology.

The consortium focuses on various issues relating to food packaging, including regulatory compliance, post-consumer polymer recycling, shelf-life extension, and biobased feedstocks for packaging. Funding sources for this work include government agencies, grants from industry, and nongovernmental organizations. The work has become increasingly important as companies face more regulation related to PFAS, a group of chemicals used in packaging materials that may harm human health.

"Our members have unfettered access to experts in the polymer and food packaging industry who can assess common industry issues and provide solutions," Vorst said.

Proximity to this expertise "provides Iowa companies with a competitive advantage," said Braaksma.

For more information, contact Rachel Hahn at rhahn@iastate.edu or 515-620-8093.

Keith Vorst, director of PFPC at the lab.



“
Being able to be there
and relay to them what
our customer tells us is
a real benefit.
”

Upcoming Event List

■ Exoskeletons Demo—Your Gateway to Automation

July 16—In Person, Ames

Take advantage of this opportunity to learn how exoskeletons can help ease common workplace challenges and improve the quality of life for employees.

<https://go.iastate.edu/XPG8G6>

■ Human Resource Strategies—Mindfulness and Authenticity in HR Practices

July 17—Virtual

Delve into mindfulness and authenticity in HR practices, including their benefits in driving positive organizational culture.

<https://go.iastate.edu/ZV36W0>

■ Navigating the Future of Work with AI, Turning Your Data into Action

July 25—Virtual

Discover the risks and rewards of AI in which we explore its impact on business and the workforce through education, real-world use cases, and helpful resources. In this session, discover how consolidating data can drive decisions and see examples of business automation and custom reporting in Power BI for labor tracking and more.

<https://go.iastate.edu/XAC81T>



Visit www.ciras.iastate.edu/events-workshops for details on these and other events.

Virtual Reality

Eases Nursing Staffing Challenges

Iowa is facing a critical nursing shortage, with 70% of its medical facilities struggling to find qualified staff and nursing institutions turning away students due to lack of space and instructor availability.

In response, VRSim, a company with operations in Waterloo, aims to address this issue through innovative virtual reality (VR) technology. VRSim's VR training aims to make nursing training faster, more accessible, and cost-effective, allowing students to practice essential nursing skills in a virtual environment.

VRSim's initiative, however, required evidence to prove its effectiveness. "We want to be able to affirm that this VR training is advantageous and scientifically effective," said Maggie Volz, business development and public relations.

"That's where we come in," said CIRAS Project Manager Brian Muff.

"CIRAS can connect Iowa companies to Iowa State researchers in almost any area. We are responsible for getting the right people at the table to discuss potential research or testing projects. We ensure that everyone understands

the scope, timeline, deliverables, and budget. Finally, we stay involved to ensure that the collaboration is on track," said Muff.

Muff facilitated a partnership with Iowa State University's Dr. Richard Stone, who specializes in human augmentation, and collaborated with VRSim to validate the VR training's benefits. This project, supported by the Iowa Legislature's Technology Assistance Program (TAP), showcased VR technology's distinct advantages when combined with traditional training.

The research confirmed VR training's value, prompting VRSim to consider expanding this technology to EMT programs. This outcome provides a potential pathway for VR in revolutionizing health-care training, highlighting the significance of academia and industry collaboration in tackling workforce challenges.

Maggie Volz of VRSim emphasized the impact beyond gaming. "Our virtual reality is not just about games and cool simulations. It is about jobs and about connecting people with career opportunities by providing them with a safe space to practice skills before entering the workplace."

This partnership has led to significant sales growth for VRSim's VR training solutions and paves the way for future projects to transform career training and health-care sector job creation. "Partnering with CIRAS has been a big plus for our company and customers. Their support not only delivered immediate project success but positioned us for long-term strategic gain," says VRSim President and CEO Matthew Wallace.

For more information, contact Brian Muff at bmuff@iastate.edu or 515-520-1033.

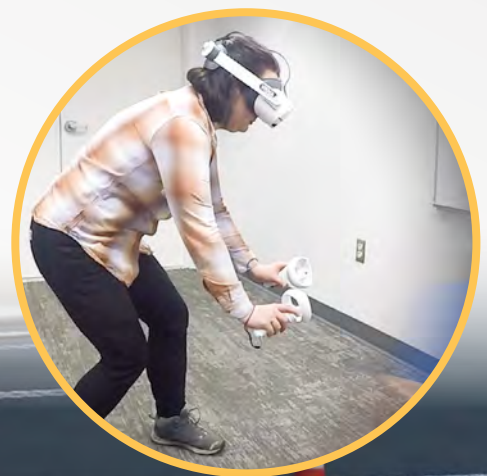
VRSIM, INC.

FOUNDED: 2002

EMPLOYEES: 18

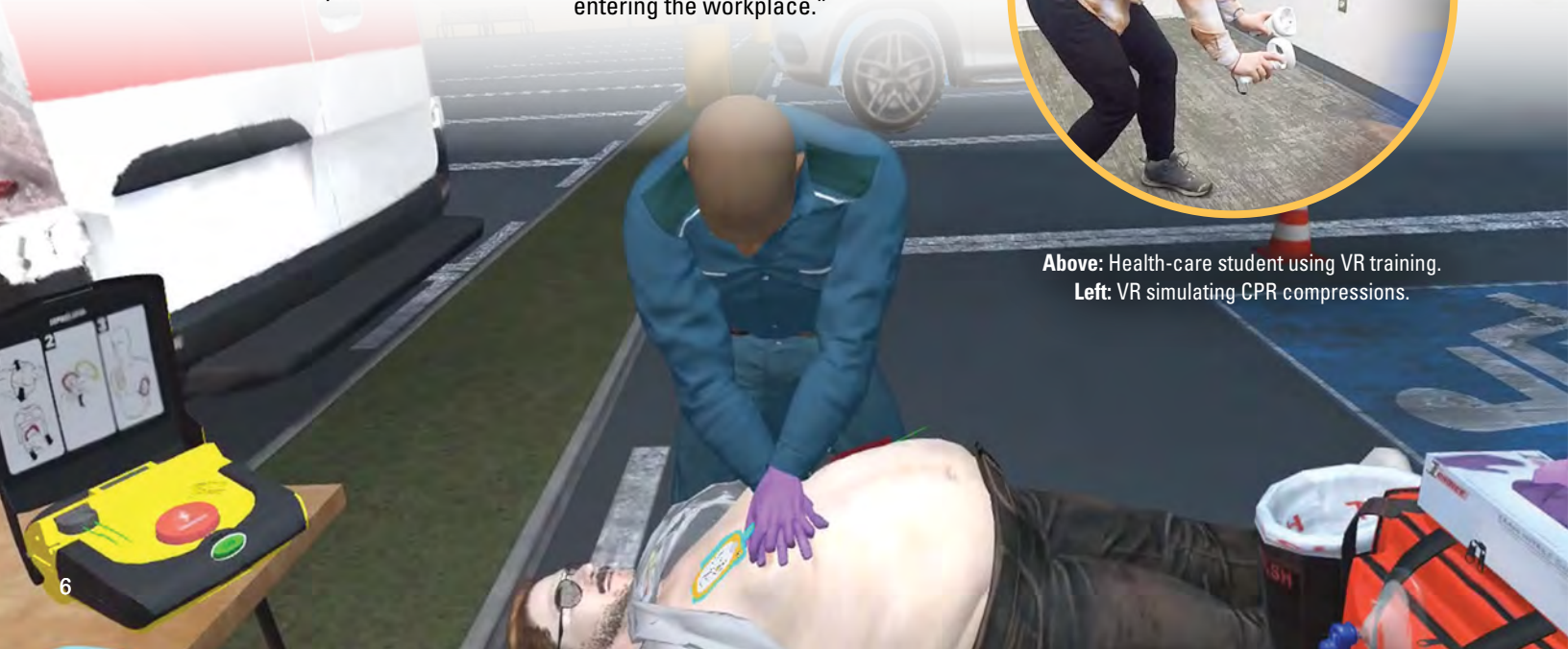
OVERVIEW: Provides virtual reality training solutions for the allied health, manufacturing, and public safety workforce.

IMPACT: \$1.5 to \$2 million in new sales of VR training in nursing.



Above: Health-care student using VR training.

Left: VR simulating CPR compressions.





Partnership with CIRAS, Career Services Pays Off

STELLAR INDUSTRIES

FOUNDED: 1990

EMPLOYEES: 800+

OVERVIEW:

Manufacturer of service trucks, cranes, hook lifts, trailers, and service truck accessories.

IMPACT: Increase in intern applicants.

Student interest in internships at Stellar Industries is rising thanks to the company's work with CIRAS and Iowa State University's Engineering Career Services (ECS). The three entities have been collaborating on strategies to enhance awareness of internship opportunities, and their efforts are paying off.

Stellar Industries, headquartered in Garner, manufactures service trucks, cranes, hook lifts, trailers, and service

truck accessories. The company opened in 1990 and has grown to an industry leader with more than 800 employees across multiple U.S. locations.

"When I started at Stellar five years ago, there was already an internship program established, but we recognized the need to find ways to enhance our engagement with students and increase interest in Stellar," said Nathan Meyer, lead design engineer at Stellar Industries. "During my discussions with Mayra [Ramirez, CIRAS project manager], she mentioned several options, including working with student clubs and offering capstone projects."

"Engineering Career Services is one of our partners and a point of contact for evaluating student recruiting practices and suggesting other approaches to gain attention," said Ramirez. She advised reaching out to ECS.

"Touring the facility helped me get a better idea of the engineering majors they needed to attract, the positions they were recruiting for, and some of the challenges they were having with the process," said Kellie Olson, ECS director.

The ECS team advised updating job postings, ensuring they are current and appealing. They added details like summer housing, a significant draw for students considering rural Iowa internships, which was not previously mentioned in postings.

“

Without their help, we would still struggle to attract enough students to fill our positions.

”

"Stellar attended our Engineering Career Fair, which is a great way to connect with students, but we encouraged them also to take advantage of more casual ways to interact with students like Career Fest and Pizza with Engineering Professionals," said Olson. Both are newer networking events that Olson describes as offering students opportunities to engage with prospective employers in "a less intimidating atmosphere."

Meyer said working with both groups on recruitment strategies has equipped Stellar with the tools to engage with students and share more about the company.

"We usually have about eight intern openings between our design and production engineering departments," Meyer said. "The increased interest generated through ideas from CIRAS and Engineering Career Services has given us a larger group of students to interview for those positions. Without their help, we would still struggle to attract enough students to fill our positions."

For more information, contact Mayra Ramirez at ramirez@m-iastate.edu or 515-520-3101.

MAPPING YOUR SUPPLY CHAINS:

A Guide to Risk Prioritization and Action

The Strategic Advantage of Mapping Key Products

Manufacturers often face supply chain disruptions without knowing their timing or impact. Assessing risks and implementing management practices can seem overwhelming, especially without dedicated staff or tools.

A practical solution exists: map the supply chain of a key product. Visuals like maps are more intuitive than spreadsheets, highlighting areas for improved safety stock and reduced variability.

This exercise identifies risks and opportunities and enhances organization-wide understanding, similar to how value stream mapping sheds light on internal operations. Supply chain mapping offers a roadmap for broader risk management by visualizing material sources, supplier networks, and distribution channels.

Begin by gathering data to create a comprehensive map with supplier information and performance metrics. This provides clear insights for strategic decisions, making it a valuable tool for manufacturers seeking to navigate supply chain challenges effectively.

Mapping Program: A Tool for Visual Data Analysis

Map your supply chain—a mapping program identifies vulnerabilities and risks and deepens understanding of costs and supplier interdependencies. It serves as a central data repository, facilitating easy access and updates. CIRAS offers templates and best practices for data collection.

A detailed map visualizes various aspects of your supply chain—including supplier locations, critical material sources, and potential bottlenecks—highlighting improvement areas.

You might be surprised where your Tier 2 and 3 suppliers are located. You may be more dependent on overseas shipping than you think. Or you may want to pursue other options for your most critical materials or hard-to-find parts. This will help identify potential bottlenecks and opportunities for improvements.

Opportunities and Risks Uncovered

Maximizing the benefits of supply chain mapping involves collaboration with knowledgeable partners. CIRAS can help you understand the fundamentals of mapping in the context of your greater supply chain strategy.

Mapping helps categorize parts based on vulnerability, uniqueness, or criticality, offering insights into supplier relationships and identifying opportunities for leveraging supply chain strengths.

CIRAS: Your Partner in Supply Chain Mapping

Many manufacturers seek to enhance their supply chain management but struggle to know where to start. Mapping facilitates comprehensive supplier performance and risk management, suggesting strategies for engaging with key partners. CIRAS provides a structured approach to mapping your supply chains.

For more information, contact Marc Schneider at maschn@iastate.edu or 563-221-1596.

Upcoming Supply Chain Learning Opportunities

Supply Chain 101 Series Kicks Off in July

Join our 2024 workshop series on key supply chain topics, starting with an overview of supply chains, options, risks, and concerns. Dive deeper into inventory, warehouse, procurement, distribution management, and negotiations. The series starts with a half-day in-person session on July 10 in Ames or July 11 in Davenport, followed by weekly virtual sessions from July 17 through August 28.

All attendees receive complimentary registration to the annual CIRAS Supply Chain Seminar held on September 11, 2024, in Ames.

To register, visit <https://go.iastate.edu/6KYLOY>



CIRAS Supply Chain Seminar

September 11, 2024
Registration coming soon

Iowa Company Finds Success in Hawaii

Surveillance equipment provided by an Iowa company and one of its client partners helps address a poaching problem happening at state parks in Hawaii.

BizReps, located in Davenport, and two partners recently delivered solar-powered surveillance equipment to the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources in Maui. The equipment captures illegal activity and information on suspected poachers, such as license plate numbers. BizReps found the opportunity through BidMatch, a customized bid-matching service the CIRAS APEX program offers clients.

"The department needed to replace their current equipment," said Tim Woods, a managing partner with BizReps. "They wanted surveillance cameras that could withstand a saltwater environment and push information to the cloud to monitor the equipment remotely. That is not unlike something we are doing in another industry. So, we started with that and made the changes this client needed."



Solar panel surveillance equipment.

BizReps is a sales agency specializing in renewable, sustainable products and systems. They worked with two partners on the Hawaii project: Solar Research Technologies, LLC, which made the equipment, and Silver Linings Technology, which manages the connectivity.

With the support of Samantha Ferm-LeClere, APEX government contracting specialist, BizReps is taking steps to make other government agencies aware of their product.

"We've talked about connecting with potential buyers through trade shows and conferences," said Ferm-LeClere. "Our market research showed several potential opportunities for them. Our focus is to help them grow their past performance at the state level so they will be positioned well for federal work."

Woods connected with a Michigan Department of Natural Resources representative at a recent trade show in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. They are interested in using the BizReps system to observe ice flow at 19 harbors. The surveillance system would significantly reduce the time DNR personnel drive from harbor to harbor.

"Without Samantha's help—from getting us certified for government contracting to helping with our capabilities statement—we would've missed some great opportunities," said Woods. "I can't tell you how glad I am that we connected with CIRAS."

For more information, contact Samantha Ferm-LeClere at siferm@iastate.edu or 319-333-9558.

BIZREPS

FOUNDED: 2017 | EMPLOYEES: 11

OVERVIEW: Sales agency specializing in renewable, sustainable products, systems, and solutions.

IMPACT: Awarded a \$41,000 contract from the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources.

CIRAS Staff News

Steve Forbes joined CIRAS as a process improvement project manager. He has a rich background in Lean thinking and methodologies from various manufacturing environments. Most recently, he served as the Lean training specialist for Iowa Prison Industries (IPI), where he codeveloped the Prison Industries Manufacturing and Management System, a Toyota-based production system, teaching Lean principles to incarcerated individuals in Iowa and nationally. Before IPI, he worked at Harley Davidson, focusing on continuous improvement. Steve is an alum of Iowa State University with a degree in agricultural mechanization.

For more information, contact Steve Forbes at sforbes@iastate.edu or 515-620-8217.



Drew Forster joined CIRAS as the construction industry strategic advisor. He brings extensive experience from his service in the U.S. Air Force's Civil Engineering Squadron on foreign and domestic soil, owning a new-home general contracting company and as a project manager at a commercial construction company. With a PMP certification, an MBA, and a bachelor of science in agribusiness management from the University of Missouri, Drew is well equipped to promote growth, drive technology innovation, and assist the construction industry in Iowa.

For more information, contact Drew Forster at dforster@iastate.edu or 515-686-0298.



CIRAS welcomed **Ally Kuehl** as a business administrator. With more than a decade of experience in fiscal management and operations, including roles at Iowa State University Recreation Services and as an office manager at a dermatology clinic, Ally brings valuable expertise. She is skilled in third-party process management, financial management, and regulatory reporting. Ally has demonstrated experience in enhancing efficiencies through process refinement and implementing new operational processes. She holds a bachelor of science in kinesiology from Iowa State University.

For more information, contact Ally Kuehl at akuehl@iastate.edu or 515-686-0299.



SENATOR ERNST'S ENTREPRENEUR EXPO

A GATHERING FOR GROWTH IN AMES

This August, Ames will host the second Senator Ernst's Entrepreneur Expo, an event for Iowa's small business community. Supported by CIRAS APEX, America's SBDC, and Senator Joni Ernst, the expo aims to connect Iowa small businesses and local entrepreneurs with government contracting opportunities and insights into federal innovation programs. Following the success of last year's event, which featured educational workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, preparations are underway for the August expo.

Jodi Essex, CIRAS APEX director, said, "The federal government and our Department of Defense are looking for ways to utilize existing commercial technologies of Iowa businesses and apply them in new and innovative ways to help strengthen our military. There are many pathways a business can take to work with the government besides traditional contracting methods, and this event is a great way to learn about them. Having Washington, D.C., representatives from multiple agencies travel to Ames to meet Iowa businesses is a fantastic opportunity. Even if your business is new to this market, our APEX Accelerator team is here to assist you through the process."

Registration for this year's event on August 6 is now live.
<https://go.iastate.edu/5TL3TM>



For more information, contact Jodi Essex at jodir@iastate.edu or 515-509-0769.



Senator Joni Ernst with table exhibitor at 2023 Senator Ernst's Entrepreneur Expo.

New Lean Tour Format Offers Lessons for Hosts and Attendees

Go to Gemba with the Iowa Lean Consortium

Those experienced in Lean methodology will connect with the word Gemba, which reminds leaders to go and see where the work is done and to talk to people doing the work. Going to Gemba is a core tenet of Lean philosophy, and now the ILC is using Gemba experiences to drive more collaboration among Iowa businesses.

ILC staff members experienced a new approach to Lean Tour when they accompanied a group of ILC members to Kentucky in 2023. On that trip, they went to Gemba, observed the power of feedback sessions with the host companies, and decided to bring the idea back to Iowa.

The ILC tested the new approach by hosting 23 ILC members at Spartech LLC and Helena Industries in Pleasant Hill, Iowa. These tours encouraged mutual learning and insights, promoting a culture of shared growth and continuous improvement.

The hosting companies shared their histories and the paths they have taken toward continuous improvement and then provided guided tours of their facilities. After the tours, the attendees were encouraged to provide constructive feedback to the

companies. The attendees not only learned from the hosts but were able to give the hosts ideas for improving their processes.

Tour participant Riley Speed from Superior Tube shared, "I valued the transparent discussion on what enhances continuous improvement efforts. A key takeaway was integrating our overarching strategy into our Managing for Daily Improvement boards. The way Helena Industries showcased their strategic challenges on their Kata Boards was particularly impressive."

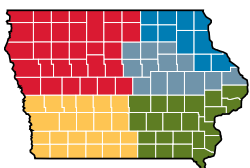
Joe Patava from Advanced Heat Treat in Waterloo noted, "The opportunity to visit two facilities in one day, each at different points in their Lean journey, was invaluable. It was enlightening to compare and contrast, especially seeing them consecutively."

For more information or to host your own Lean Learning Tour, contact Tracy Schuster at tschust@iastate.edu or 515-715-0164.



Gemba tour participants in action.

CIRAS CONTACT INFORMATION



Locate your county to find your best introduction to CIRAS.

Your strategic advisor can help connect you with the expertise you need for your business.



All staff information can be found at www.ciras.iastate.edu/staff-directory.

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WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Elevating Company Success through Cultural Transformation

The term “culture” is often used differently and invokes various interpretations. When it comes to a business and its workforce, though, we prefer describing culture as the personality of a company. Just like people, those personalities have benefits and challenges.

Companies prioritizing innovation and action can align effectively with employees who share similar values, though they should be mindful of differing energy levels among staff. Firms that are assertive and willing to take risks can benefit from incorporating empathy into their culture to maintain healthy employee relationships. On the other hand, companies resistant to change may find it challenging to attract fresh talent and ideas, which can hinder growth. Meanwhile, organizations that emphasize empathy and provide supportive environments will likely cultivate solid and enduring relationships with their employees.

Regardless of the dominant personality of a company, we know caring makes a difference—in retention and business results.

To attract the right people to apply and retain workers, employers must demonstrate appreciation for their workforce. This appreciation and value can be put into action through various tactics.

Recognizing the importance of company culture in employee attraction, retention, and business outcomes, employers need to demonstrate appreciation for their workforce. This can be achieved through the following:

- Policies that put employees first
- Recognition for hard work and achievements
- Supportive work environments designed to create employee collaboration
- Safe and ergonomically friendly spaces to work
- Professional development opportunities
- Genuine interactions that enhance relationship building

Such strategies attract the right talent and maintain a committed workforce. For companies aiming to foster a caring culture and that want to build enduring relationships with employees, engaging with CIRAS could be the first step toward cultural transformation.

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