



Kent Elastomer Products Inc.



**Bob Oborn**  
*president*  
[www.kentelastomer.com](http://www.kentelastomer.com)

# Lean is the answer

**K**ent Elastomer Products Inc. was a traditional rubber company in Northeast Ohio, and realized it needed to change its presence as a dirty, dangerous and autocratic rust belt business to a world-class manufacturer that emphasized quality and service.

The reinvention process was accomplished over the last 10 years, and was no easy task. But with the leadership and vision from former President Murray Van Epp, the company broke down internal barriers and built an infrastructure that would empower employees to change their involvement with the company.

“We knew we needed to change how we managed our business and how we engaged our employees,” says Bob Oborn, Kent Elastomer’s current president. “We found our answer was in lean manufacturing.”

The organization, waste reduction and employee involvement in lean manufacturing was exactly what Kent

Elastomer needed. Employees as well as management were trained in the lean operation system. A total cultural transformation began.

There was a significant investment in time and equipment to reach the lean operation goals. But it more than paid for itself. Departmental efficiencies skyrocketed as employees designed their own work centers. Turnover decreased from 50 percent to nearly zero.

“Employee morale is at an all-time high, and we are considered a great place to work,” Oborn says. “We increased our sales by a third and only added two people.”

Over a year of training and adjustment, the level of trust and communication between employees, departments and managers has exponentially improved.

“My vision is to have clear and open communication throughout all levels of the organization,” Oborn says. “That will be my nirvana.” ●