

This is a printer-friendly version of an article from [www.theday.com](http://www.theday.com) or [www.zip06.com](http://www.zip06.com).  
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published May 9, 2010

**Business snapshot:**

Name: Atlantic Packaging Group LLC

Location: 387 North Main St., Norwich

Products: Specialty packaging, including cartons and displays

Employees: 48

History: The firm began in 1917 as the Atlantic Carton Corp.

Telephone: (860) 889-1344

Website: [www.atlanticpackaginggroup.com](http://www.atlanticpackaginggroup.com)

## Manufacturer succeeds by embracing new ideas

By [Anthony Cronin](#) Day Business Editor

### Atlantic Packaging Group teams up with college students

The Atlantic Packaging Group in Norwich has been around a long time, but it's always evolved to meet the needs of its customers and stay competitive as a manufacturer of innovative cartons and displays.

So when a team of students and faculty from Three Rivers Community College pitched an idea to work with the manufacturer to further boost productivity, and profits, by using "lean" production techniques, plant management voiced a resounding yes.

After all, manufacturing in Connecticut isn't an easy pursuit at times, with intense global competition, high energy costs and volatile commodity prices. The Norwich-based college's proposal proved itself a win-win for both groups: Three Rivers students received a semester's worth of valuable on-the-job experience with

a specialty manufacturer, and Atlantic Packaging this week will hear the students final proposals to make its manufacturing process more "lean."

Says Bill Mulcahy, a longtime veteran of the aerospace industry and Three Rivers' instructor on advanced lean manufacturing, "It's about changing the culture of the plant, and it does that through a bunch of tools used to remove waste and to focus on the customer by adding value to the customer."

Mulcahy explains that "lean" techniques can be applied to any setting, from an office to a sprawling manufacturing plant. In manufacturing, there are many processes that don't add any value to the customer's end product, and the customer isn't willing to pay for that. So the more a plant can cut waste, reduce inefficiency and boost productivity, the better it is for the customer and the company.

Doreen Sylvestre, Atlantic Packaging's vice president for finance and one of the privately held firm's owners, says she was impressed with the Three Rivers students, who have been working in the plant since January and will present their final "lean" proposal to Atlantic Packaging officials on Wednesday, the final day of class.

"They had to go through the whole process of what we do here, and that took a lot of time," she says.

Atlantic Packaging, located in the Greeneville section of Norwich, was founded in 1917 as the Atlantic Carton Corp. Since then, the firm's giant presses and other machinery have moved from making basic cartons to turning out sophisticated packaging, cartons and displays for industries ranging from consumer goods to food and beverage, sporting goods, pharmaceutical and medical. Its packaging can be found on Yankee Candle products, Spalding sports gear, L'Oreal hair products and E. & J. Gallo Winery offerings.

The manufacturing plant employs nearly 50 skilled workers, who can take a product from its initial conception and design to the finished good, ready to display a product like brandy or shampoo or hair-styling treatments.

Mulcahy says that lean manufacturing creates a whole "culture of improvement" by examining a company's entire work process to determine how to eliminate waste - from defects to over processing, inventory issues or transportation logjams - that will make the business more competitive, the customer happier and the firm's bottom line healthier.

He says that typically 95 percent of a company's activity is "non-value added" to the customer. "Companies tend to focus on improving the five percent rather than eliminating the 95 percent," he explains.

This semester, his students spent time using a host of "lean" tools, including "value" mapping the manufacturer's entire work process, to determine where efficiencies could be found and improvements to production could be made.

Mulcahy points out that Atlantic Packaging is not unique. Every company can improve through lean techniques, whether it produces things or is more service driven, such as an office or legal firm.

The Three Rivers students at Atlantic Packaging were part of several teams of students in the college's lean manufacturing program that spent their spring semester in local firms. The other team spent the semester with the Seconn Fabrication and manufacturing plant in Waterford analyzing part of its office process. "Lean manufacturing principles and tools apply to any process, not just manufacturing," says Mulcahy.

Peg Stroup, director of business and industry services at Three Rivers, says the lean course is part of a

two-certificate program offered by the college in lean manufacturing and supply-chain management. She points out that the students in the certificate program will be attractive to future employers because they can show their hands-on experience in lean and supply chain management, which these days are crucial to manufacturers and other companies. The students, she says, have done an exhaustive analysis of Atlantic Packaging's entire operation, and already the plant has instituted an innovative four-day work week, which improves productivity and was heartily endorsed by its employees, and enacted cross-training techniques among its skilled workers. Mulcahy and Stroup, along with Atlantic Packaging's Sylvestre, say they've been very impressed with the Three Rivers students' deep understanding and commitment to lean manufacturing and Atlantic Packaging's continued success manufacturing its complex, and innovative, packaging goods.

Stroup says that as part of the certificate program, Three Rivers offers two courses each in lean manufacturing and supply-chain management - the fall courses are more introductory, while the spring semester courses are more hands on with the lean or supply chain processes.

"This is all about work force development," she says. "Some of the students are either unemployed or underemployed or dislocated workers who are trying to retrain and retool for advanced manufacturing."

At Atlantic Packaging, Stroup says the Three Rivers students (and a plant executive who is also taking the lean course) "have just done wonderful things and really helped the company streamline a lot of processes, and save money." Team members this semester included Dan Vellucci, John Hinton, Dave Fiore, Abram Reed, Mike Blodgett and Erv Piela (a plant executive).

Judy Resnick, who heads the education foundation at the Hartford-based Connecticut Business & Industry Association, says the successes of the lean manufacturing class at Atlantic Packaging were made possible through a federal Department of Labor High Growth Job Training Initiative Grant, which allowed 10 of this state's community colleges to offer courses in lean manufacturing and supply chain improvements. Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson served as the project manager for the schools. CBIA was awarded the federal grant, and in addition to the college participants, the federal grant also funded numerous programs for incumbent workers at manufacturers around the state.

Getting the grant was a long, intensive process that included those from business and academia. "We talked to a number of manufacturers," says Resnick, "and asked what keeps you up at night and they said 'we need to be more productive, we can't compete if we're not.' "

She says her organization worked with the community colleges and took a number of faculty into industry for summer "externships" where they could learn how "lean" techniques worked in the real world.

The end result, she says, is a program that can carry on after the federal funding ran out, "and really prepare people for the work world."

"We wanted very much to make sure that the course(s) met the needs of business and industry and provided both the companies and the students something that was valued by the manufacturers," she says.

[a.cronin@theday.com](mailto:a.cronin@theday.com)

---