

# Consortium formed to help businesses land contracts

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Some local businesses, educational institutions and volunteers have formed the Three Rivers Manufacturing & Technology Consortium to bring more opportunities to the area and win more government contracts.

The Arsenal Island-based consortium follows the lead of Rockford-area flexible manufacturing networks that have been successful in grabbing government contracts and providing work for network members, said Sam Kupresin, a volunteer for the consortium who helped organize the group about a year ago.

A single company might not be able to finish a government contract by itself, said Tim Frye, site manager for the Rock Island Arsenal Development Group. But by being part of a large consortium of companies, members could pool their resources to get government contracts.

The consortium will be paired with the Rodman Manufacturing Laboratory at a site in the Joint Manufacturing Technical Center, a space that's currently being renovated. The laboratory will help small manufacturing businesses get started by letting them use machines for contract work -- machines that small businesses can't afford to buy, Mr. Kupresin said. The laboratory will tap the expertise of educational institutions, like the University of Iowa, Iowa City; Northern Illinois University, DeKalb; and Western Illinois University, Macomb.

The laboratory could provide training and apprenticeship programs for students from local high schools and colleges. It also will research technologies for titanium production and lightweight composites made of carbon fiber, plastics and other elements. Titanium can be used to fabricate armor.

The consortium hasn't signed up any manufacturers as members yet, but it hopes to kick off the project on June 28 at its symposium, Mr. Kupresin said.

Once the group gets going, the Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at Black Hawk College will guide the consortium on how to get government contracts, said Vicky Miller, PTAC coordinator for the northwest region.

PTAC works with the U.S. Department of Defense and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to provide work for local businesses, Ms. Miller said. PTAC also offers classes and seminars to business owners.

Black Hawk College also assisted a similar manufacturing network a few years ago, but the group disbanded because it was hard to get businesses together.

Mr. Kupresin said he wants to learn from others' mistakes to make sure the new consortium will last.

Wednesday, U.S. Reps. Phil Hare, D-Rock Island, and Don Manzullo, R-Rockford, announced that they would work together to help the manufacturing consortium move forward.

The Quad City Development Group has asked for more than \$1 million in federal money for the consortium and other Arsenal Island requests, group senior vice president Thom Hart said.

## Take a survey

The Three Rivers Manufacturing & Technology Consortium is asking businesses to fill out a feasibility survey on its Web site at [www.threeriversmtc.com](http://www.threeriversmtc.com) to identify the area's economic needs. That way, the group can fulfill those needs.