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Wampler helps develop manufacturing workforce

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Four years ago, Gov. John Hickenlooper's Colorado Blueprint, a state-wide economic development plan, earmarked 11 key economic sectors across the state. Advanced Manufacturing was identified as an economic driver in Northern Colorado. From this, a collaboration of manufacturing professionals came together and formed The NoCo Manufacturing Partnership. Working with public-private partners, the all-volunteer membership organization supports Northern Colorado manufacturers.

Tony Wampler, business-development manager with Springs Fabrication Advanced Technology Group, attended the partnership's first meeting. Today, he's chairman of the Board of Directors.

Public partners play important roles in the collaboration. Workforce centers in Larimer and Weld counties and the Colorado Workforce Development Center are primary partners. Front Range and Aims community colleges work closely with the partnership to develop the manufacturing specialists of tomorrow. Professional organizations Manufacturer's

Edge and Colorado Advanced Manufacturing Alliance have developed strategic alliances with the partnership.

Speaking from his experiences at Spring Fabrication ATG, Wampler points to the lack of a skilled workforce in today's employment arena. "In order for us to grow our business, we have to have the skills to do that," he said. "Right now, that is one of the focuses of the partnership: working with the community colleges and organizations like Skillful and Worklife [Partnership] to develop those skills and bring more trained people into manufacturing."

Sharpening that competitive edge throughout the region is one of the partnership's key strategies. Creating more opportunities in advanced manufacturing factors into the big-picture plan with innovation and automation taking a front-row seat.

"It's in my blood," said Wampler of the manufacturing industry. "My father worked at Caterpillar. Growing up, he would tell me what he was working on and take me to the plant. I got to see how they built those big yellow tractors you saw at every construction site. Before that, my grandfather was in the oil-equipment business.

Manufacturing runs in the family."

Right out of high school, an opportunity working for one of his dad's suppliers in the mining sector presented itself to Wampler. He got his start in the shipping room. The next step was moving to Springs Fabrication, where his career took off.

"I'm the poster child for that guy starting in the shipping dock and working his way up the ladder," Wampler laughed. He moved from project manager to senior project manager to general manager over time. Now he's in business development, paving the way for greater growth.

Bringing his experience and knowledge to the partnership is meaningful for Wampler. Sharing it with the next generation of manufacturers and helping them see how their out-of-the-box thinking can make a difference brings even more meaning to his work.

"Over the past 20 years, I've been involved with many partnerships and manufacturing organizations. The partnership is the only one that has gained and sustained momentum," Wampler said. "We're four years into this and stronger than we were on day one. That's exciting. Real exciting."

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- 2014** Northern Colorado Chapter, American Red Cross, Fort Collins
- 2013** Pamela King, Mountain States Better Business Bureau
- 2012** CSU College of Veterinary Medicine, Fort Collins
- 2010** Area Chambers of Commerce (Fort Collins, Greeley, Loveland)
- 2008-09** CSU Office of Economic Development, Fort Collins
- 2007** AIMS Community College, Greeley/Loveland
- 2006** Premier Colorado, Fort Collins
- 2005** New Belgium Brewing Co., Fort Collins
- 2004** Monfort Family Foundation, Eaton
- 2003** The Bohemian Foundation, Fort Collins
- 2002** Longs Peak Council of the Boy Scouts
- 2001** State Farm Insurance Co., Greeley/Evans
- 2000** Greeley Independence Stampede, Greeley
- 1999** Eastman Kodak Co. (Kodak Colorado Division), Windsor
- 1998** Hewlett Packard Co., Fort Collins