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Minnesota Manufacturing Awards

Five companies receive top honors.

BY MAURA KELLER // PHOTOS BY TATE CARLSON

THESE DAYS, JUST ABOUT every manufacturer is facing some kind of economic challenge. From cancelled products to reduced spending to legislative changes that will affect their bottom line, Minnesota manufacturers are working hard to retain their market share—thinking outside of the proverbial box to incorporate new systems, new products, new services and embracing new innovations like never before. ¶ To recognize the outstanding manufacturers that have made an impact on this vital Minnesota industry, *Minnesota Business* and the Minnesota Precision Manufacturing Association (MPMA) have honored five companies with the 2011 Minnesota Manufacturing Awards. The winners of this year's awards (nominated by peers and selected by a panel of MPMA experts) were honored at MPMA's annual meeting Oct. 27 at the Doubletree Hotel Minneapolis Park Place.

Top Woman-Owned Manufacturing Company of the Year

Embracing her role as leader, Darlene Miller takes Permac Industries to the next level.

IN AN INDUSTRY often dominated by men, women business owners have a lot to be proud of. Take Darlene Miller, for example. As owner and chief executive officer of Burnsville-based Permac Industries, a company that specializes in components and assemblies for aerospace, medical, transportation, food and beverage industries, Miller has worked diligently to make her company an award-winning enterprise. After emerging from tough economic times that took many companies out of the game, earning the Top Woman-Owned Manufacturing Company of the Year award is especially meaningful for Miller and her staff.

Like many companies, Permac Industries experienced its own economic setbacks due to recent economic downturn. But Miller didn't give in. Rather, she streamlined production efficiencies, expanded the

company's reach with new industry certifications, and developed a leaner approach to most aspects of her business.

Today, Permac Industries is a thriving entity, with revenues up 43 percent, capital investment down .03 percent, and the total number of employees up 18 percent. While numbers often speak for themselves, Miller says Permac Industries has also made its mark on the industry by employing talented and dedicated employees who comprise a fun and can-do team.

"We have a reputation for our on-time delivery and quality," Miller says. "Our team personifies 'serve the customer,' which we achieve by our belief in 'yes we can.' Our certifications with ISO 2001-2008, ISO 13485 and being compliant to AS9100 certainly help prove our quality and dedication to continuous improvement. So we continue to earn awards for our team's achievements."

Miller stresses that the economic dip in 2009 and 2010 was immense, therefore the company's current strong numbers in revenues, capital investments and employee gain look great; but the reality is that Permac is only back to pre-2009 numbers—but with much leaner processes.

"The recession really did force us to evaluate our customer base and the products we manufacture, so we made the conscious decision to focus

» Darlene Miller, owner and CEO of Permac Industries, holding a part Permac manufactures for the aerospace industry.

*Top
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**Permac
Industries**

on the higher precision industries such as aerospace and medical and eliminate the commodity and low-margin jobs,” Miller says.

Miller embraces the challenge of continuous change and helping her employees grow and excel beyond their own expectations.

“The other passion I hold is to have manufacturing become a valued and recognized career that people are proud to be a part of,” Miller says. “I love my role as a leader in our industry and being blessed with working with so many wonderful people that include my employees, our customers and vendors and my other colleagues in the manufacturing world. A lot of people think that Permac is in the precision machining business, and it is. But I am really in the *people* business, in the precision machining industry.”

Miller’s innovative spirit and energy certainly gets things done. And gets her recognized. In February 2011, Miller was appointed by President Obama to serve on the President’s Council for Jobs and Competitiveness, which consists of 27 diverse business leaders working on non-partisan ideas to bolster the U.S. economy by fostering job creation and innovation.

“My primary sub-group is high-tech education, which I co-chair with Paul Otellini, the CEO of Intel,” Miller says. “I am proud to announce we have an accelerated CNC machinist training program called Right Skills in Minnesota. It is a 16-week accelerated program including an internship program that Dunwoody Institute of Technology and South Central College will begin to offer in January 2012,” Miller says. This pilot program is expected to be rolled out nationally to help people all across the country gain the skills needed to have a career in advanced manufacturing.

“It is a passion of mine to bring more females into our manufacturing and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) worlds,” Miller says. “So this award is a highly visible way to showcase women in this field, and that we can achieve and be as successful as our male colleagues.”

