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**Editorial**

**In Praise of the PMRAP**

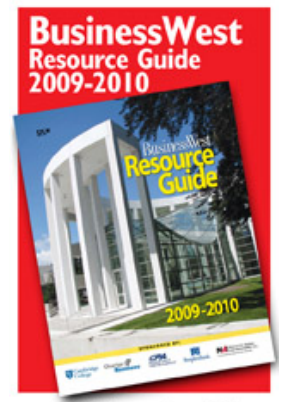
It's an acronym not likely to become part of the local lexicon anytime soon, if ever, except maybe among some economic-development leaders and professors at UMass Amherst.

But PMRAP — that's the Precision Manufacturing Regional Alliance Project — is worthy of gaining a place in the region's vocabulary, because it's already a good story and has the potential to become a great one.

Why? Because it embodies many positive elements identified as critical to making this region more vibrant and able to compete in an increasingly global marketplace. First, it involves partnerships between area economic-development agencies, businesses, and colleges. Second, it takes the involvement of the UMass Amherst campus to an increasingly higher plane in terms of economic vibrancy and long-term prosperity. And third, it involves the region's manufacturing sector, and specifically the precision-machining industry, which has enjoyed a long history of innovation and can still play a key role in the Pioneer Valley economy going forward.

PMRAP, as the full name suggests, is all about an alliance — between area precision-manufacturing operations; the university; other schools, including STCC, Holyoke Community College, and several vocational technical high schools; and organizations like the Economic Development Council of Western Mass. and the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County. All these players have a common goal: to help bring research at UMass to the boardrooms and shop floors of area manufacturers, with the goal of driving innovation and, in the process, creating jobs.

There are many elements to this equation, with one of the keys being something called technology-innovation forums, which, in a nutshell, will open the lines of communication



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between researchers and shop owners, lines that have mostly been closed, and to the detriment of all the players involved.

There have already been four of these forums, with more scheduled for the months to come. Thus far, those involved say they're doing exactly what they were designed to do: stimulate a dialogue between two groups that can definitely help one another.

Area shop owners can provide researchers with problems to solve — which is what researchers live for. Meanwhile, researchers can solve the problems and, in the process, give shop owners new and better processes, new materials, and new ways to approach business.

And with all that, these manufacturers can retain market share, grow market share, tap into new markets, expand, and add new, well-paying jobs in a region that remains desperate for some.

Meanwhile, there's something else: A region that once made its reputation for generating innovative products and processes can turn back the clock in that regard.

No one can say with any degree of certainty how many jobs the PMRAP may create or retain. It's much too early in the process for that, and there are, by most all accounts, no models of this kind of alliance to study anywhere in the country.

But what is known is that this program certainly looks good on paper. Actually, it looks good in conference rooms at the university and in some area precision-manufacturing facilities — places where these technology-innovation forums have been staged since last fall.

In those three sessions, participants could see that PMRAP isn't just words, and it isn't just an acronym. It's a blueprint for progress.