



Guest Columnist - Manufacturing success in Maryland

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By *ARIS MELISSARATOS*,
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Earlier this year, the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, in conjunction with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, undertook a survey of the state's manufacturing firms to assess the business climate in that industry sector. Maryland's manufacturing industry is showing signs of improvement.

The survey results revealed that sector expected to add 500 net new jobs between June and November 2003. This is a significant change from the six-month period prior to May 2003, when manufacturing was contracting in Maryland and the nation's economy was still struggling to recover from the recession. These results confirm our belief in the strength of the Maryland economy. We are especially gratified by indications that small businesses, in particular, are likely to lead the turnaround in the manufacturing sector.

The era of the 30,000-worker mega-factory in Maryland is gone. Manufacturing today is about technology. That is why programs such as the Maryland World Class Manufacturing Consortium and the Maryland ISO Consortium, which help manufacturers attain world class manufacturing status and ISO Certification in order to compete in the global marketplace, are so critical to our manufacturing industry.

Every manufacturer — whether they're making labels, cans, cars, transmissions, proteins, genes or software — is working at world-class levels. With new technology comes manufacturing companies that are smaller, more efficient and more productive.

The manufacturing sector is vital to the state's economic stability. Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., believes, as do I, that manufacturing has an important role to play in the state and that we must continue to work with this sector to ensure they have the tools they need to succeed in today's global economy. This means having access to a highly skilled work force that is trained to work in the new technological workplace. And it means that the state must provide a business environment that encourages and supports companies looking to expand and bring good paying jobs to the marketplace.

In Maryland we have a number of manufacturing success stories — Allison Transmission, Volvo/Mack Trucks, Northrop Grumman, Schlumberger, PACE Worldwide — that are all a testament to the state's outstanding manufacturing sector. But it's not just the large manufacturing companies that make Maryland's manufacturing industry strong, it's also the many excellent small companies located across the state that keep the industry alive and growing.

The future of manufacturing depends on our ability to excel in the commercialization of new products and processes that begin with Maryland's preeminence in research and development and engineering. We must strive to continue to excel in the technologies of the future: biotechnology

and information technology to nanotechnology, advanced materials — and beyond.

Aris Melissaratos is secretary of the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development. He writes a monthly column for The Daily Record.

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