

GRIT, IRON, AND THE QUIET STRENGTH FORGED IN SOUTH BELOIT, ROSCOE

In November 2025, an employee at State Line Foundries lost everything when his house burned to the ground. He arrived at work the next morning with little more than the clothes on his back.

Before the ashes cooled, State Line's leadership provided him with a check, connected him with local charities, and made sure he and his family had what they needed to begin rebuilding. There was no handbook directive for this. The story reflects the spirit of a hometown manufacturer.

Manufacturing in Illinois is deeply human, deeply local, and inseparable from the quiet strength of communities like South Beloit, where **Winnebago Foundry** is located, as well as its parent company, State Line Foundries, in nearby Roscoe. The two facilities employ 115 people whose livelihoods, families, and futures are woven into the fabric along the Illinois-Wisconsin border.

Part of the IMEC *Made in My Hometown* series, State Line Foundries highlights how manufacturers across the state create impact far beyond their balance sheets.

FOUNDRIES POWER EVERYDAY LIFE

With roughly 300 customers across nearly every industrial sector, State Line Foundries' castings help keep water flowing into homes, food production moving, firefighters equipped, factories running, and national defense systems secure.

But if you ask State Line president Jesse Milks what matters most, he doesn't start with a product list. "Our operations are very specific and labor intensive," he says. "At the end of the day, the people truly are our most important asset. If you don't take care of them, nothing else works."

That belief shows up in everyday decisions. Employees battling cancer are kept on payroll and on health insurance. Life happens, including car trouble, sick babysitters, family emergencies. The response? Understanding, not discipline.

"This isn't just a job for people," Milks says. "This is how they support their families. We take that responsibility seriously."

Coworkers regularly rally around one another, and community organizations step in when needed. The foundries do not operate apart from the community. They operate within it.

Like the time when a Wisconsin Department of Transportation road project unknowingly barricaded employees inside Winnebago Foundry's parking lot. Unsure where to turn, Milks walked into the City of South Beloit offices and explained the situation.

Within hours, **City Administrator Sonya Hoppes** was standing in front of construction crews, untangling jurisdictional confusion, and coordinating with WisDOT. By lunch, a lane had been reopened so employees could safely get in and out of work.

"Nothing good happens in South Beloit without a little dirt, grit, and hard work," Hoppes says. "And that's exactly what our manufacturers bring every day."

"This is what Illinois manufacturing really looks like," says **Dean Harms**, IMEC regional manager. "These aren't anonymous plants. These are hometown employers who take responsibility for their people, and that commitment carries over into the community."



WELCOME TO OUR 2026 MADE IN MY HOMETOWN SERIES

Illinois is driving the era of Industrial Reinvention, and IMEC is there for the more than 12,500 manufacturers statewide. When a manufacturer succeeds, the ripple effect runs deep: a stronger job market, a stronger community and state economy, a stronger national defense, and a stronger foothold for made-in-USA innovation on a global scale.

Small to midsize manufacturers are steeped in can-do spirit. Yet, many struggle with knowing how to grow. State Line Foundries' partnership with IMEC fuels the borderline communities where its two foundries are located. Their success, and others you'll meet through this series, impacts the success of employee families, supply chain partners, customers, and neighboring businesses.

We're proud to be part of State Line's hometown story and all the manufacturers who make IMEC the first stop to unstoppable.

Cheers,

David Boulay, Ph.D.
President

Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center



COMMUNITY, GRIT, AND PARTNERSHIP

South Beloit does not shy away from its industrial identity. It embraces it.

“These industries may not always be pretty,” Hoppes says. “But they are essential. They employ our residents. They generate sales and property tax. And they want to be part of the solution.”

Manufacturers like State Line anchor the local tax base and fuel an interconnected ecosystem of grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants, churches, and schools. Industrial wages circulate locally, supporting small businesses and stabilizing families.

That stability is visible inside South Beloit’s schools as well.

Emily Roer, a South Beloit Senior High School graduate who now serves as the district’s career and college director, sees firsthand how manufacturing shapes opportunity.

“For a long time, the message was that success only meant a four-year college,” Roer says. “What we’re trying to do now is make sure students are choice-ready.” That means exposing students early to local manufacturing careers, not as a fallback, but as a viable, respected pathway.

“We want students to understand what’s actually here,” Roer says. “Manufacturing today is clean, technical, and full of opportunity. When students walk into a foundry or a plant, they’re surprised by how advanced it is.” South Beloit Senior High School partners with Blackhawk Technical College in Janesville, Wis., allowing students to begin manufacturing programs like welding and industrial maintenance junior year, with tuition covered by the district.

“We start career exposure as early as middle school,” Roer says. “By the time they graduate, they’ve seen these companies. They’ve job-shadowed. They know what’s possible.”

Exposure to manufacturing helps students imagine futures and stay rooted to the community as manufacturers build the next generation of skilled workers.



KEY OPERATIONAL FACTS

- ✓ **2 foundries:** *Winnebago in South Beloit, Ill., and State Line in Roscoe, Ill. State Line acquired Winnebago in 2018.*
- ✓ **Products:**
 - ✓ *Ductile and gray iron castings up to 3,500 pounds*
 - ✓ *Rapid prototype castings*
 - ✓ *Transfer existing foundry tooling*



“The people truly are our most important asset.”



IMEC: TRANSFORMING STATE LINE'S WORKFORCE PIPELINE AND OPERATIONAL STABILITY

IMEC is the state's only public-private partnership dedicated exclusively to helping small and midsize manufacturers achieve Repeatable Excellence™. While companies like State Line bring grit, experience, and commitment, they don't always have the internal bandwidth to tackle quality systems, workforce training, or automation.

"Our job is to come in and do what we say we're going to do," Harms says. "We help manufacturers build systems that retain customers, attract new business, and protect jobs."

State Line first partnered with IMEC in the early 2000s to achieve ISO 9001 certification. IMEC supported system updates in 2015, and in 2025 guided Winnebago Foundry through its own ISO certification, while also helping secure workforce training dollars through Workforce Connection, a local grant program.

"These certifications aren't paperwork exercises," Harms says. "They open doors. They stabilize companies. And they help ensure manufacturers can keep employing people locally." Harms said State Line has saved more than \$192,000, retained 45 jobs, and added 3 new hires with IMEC versus hiring the talent in-house.

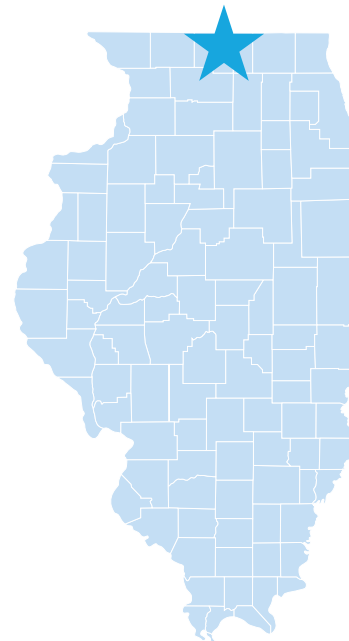


"Manufacturing today is clean, technical, and full of opportunity."



STATE LINE FOUNDRIES

13227 North 2nd Street
Roscoe, IL 61073



MANUFACTURING'S RIPPLE EFFECT

In places like South Beloit and Roscoe, manufacturing pumps life into the local economy. It keeps young people rooted. It supports housing and schools. It strengthens community institutions.

Illinois is entering an era of Industrial Reinvention, and small and midsize manufacturers sit at its center. With more than 12,500 manufacturers statewide, the opportunities are significant.

IMEC serves as the first stop on that journey, ensuring the state's industrial base doesn't just survive, but thrives.

WHY MANUFACTURING IN A HOMETOWN IS PERSONAL

The IMEC *Made in My Hometown* series makes one thing clear: When manufacturers like State Line Foundries succeed, their hometowns succeed. Employees stay rooted. Communities grow stronger. Local economies become more resilient.

Manufacturing is personal. It's a ready resource for an employee to rebuild his life after a fire and a town to reopen a road so people can get to work.

And in South Beloit, it's built like everything else – with grit.

IMEC PROJECT IMPACT

 **\$36,090**
NEW SALES
GENERATED

 **\$9 MILLION**
RETAINED SALES

 **\$192,480**
COST SAVINGS

 **3** NEW
JOBS

 **45** RETAINED
JOBS

MADE IN MY HOMETOWN SERIES

In every Illinois hometown, manufacturing impacts families, community, state, and country – and IMEC is there. We're the first stop to taking small and midsize manufacturers from status quo to unstoppable. You bring the can-do spirit, we bring the know-how to scale your goals.

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