

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

