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**LIFTED BY AN IDEA
By Dave Truman, Business Writer**

CLEVELAND (May 31, 2002) - Forklift-free factory floors could be coming to an industry near you. According to John Neumann, the trend is rooted in the growth of lean manufacturing techniques proven in Toyota auto plants, and since copied by manufacturers in industries from automotive to aerospace. Neumann and partner Larry Tyler have designed prototype material transport vehicles to capitalize on the demand for increased safety and efficiency in manufacturing. Unlike large, bulky, forklifts, these transports are more like a scaled-down and miniaturized flatbed car seen being pulled by a train. Their company, Kinetic Technologies LLC in Willoughby Hills, was founded Feb. 2 and already has made great strides toward putting the K-Tec brand non-powered transports in factories.

Neumann, a Perry Township resident who has 30 years experience in industrial management, and Tyler, a Willoughby Hills resident who spent 28 years with Lincoln Electric Co., have used their connections to gain audiences with plant managers for manufacturers such as General Motors, as well as distributors of material handling equipment. What (managers) would tell us is what they are trying to accomplish, how they are trying to move material, even if they couldn't envision exactly how it would work, Tyler said. He called the K-Tec line of modular vehicles intelligent transports because they are so easily configured for various tasks.

Kinetic plans to develop a line of eight to 10 standard transport tops, which attach to a modular base, that will meet the needs of most manufacturers. The tops vary in capabilities. One rotates a load to allow for unloading from each end, another features conveyor tracks. Another will keep a load of small cartons at a constant height for unloading. Two sizes, with maximum payloads of 6,000 and 2,000 pounds, are currently planned. The smaller transports enable workers to move loads manually, while all the vehicles can be linked, train-style to a motorized cart. In addition to making a forklift-dominated plant more efficient by increasing flexibility, the K-Tec transports should create a safer environment for workers, Tyler said. It's often times the subtle things in the vehicles that make a lot of sense such as eliminating repetitive motion and bending, reducing turning forces, reducing pushing forces and location and design of levers, he said. (Many people) take for granted the repetitive action that the worker has to go through. He might be able to do it one, two or three times. But asking a worker to make the same motion 75 or 100 times means you have to be very particular. Neumann said operators of large factories in particular are very aware of ergonomic standards and doing things so they don't create problems for their employees. We are helping them by designing these products really ergonomically correct. Custom transports will be designed as needed, though Neumann said he expects most plants to be served well by the standard line, since so much research has been put into their development.

Tyler said the K-Tec line has received strong interest from potential distributors and end users, though no contracts have been signed. We're ready, he said. We're on the edge of releasing our distribution package, which will be going to 35 distributors across the United States. Kinetic's founders expect a U.S. market worth between \$700 million and \$900 million to emerge for their product line over the next several years. Already, the company has impacted more than 10 Northeast Ohio companies as it signed up contract marketers, a manufacturer, legal support and other service providers and vendors.