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**Manufacturers Indicate Increased Optimism for 2018 –
Planning for Potential and Seizing Opportunity is Critical**

According to Leading Edge Alliance National Manufacturing Outlook Survey

CARMEL, Ind. (January 8, 2018) – Carmel, Indiana based Blue & Co., LLC and St. Charles, Illinois based Leading Edge Alliance (LEA Global) jointly released the results from the 2018 National Manufacturing Outlook Survey.

More than 450 manufacturing executives participated in the survey, which includes the opinions of respondents who produce industrial/machining, transportation/automotive, construction, food and beverage, and other products.

Optimism is high as manufacturers' responses indicated they have a more positive outlook about the economy for 2018 than in 2017. The growing U.S. and global economies, rising energy and commodity prices, and improved business and consumer confidence support this positive outlook.

Survey results for 2018 include:

- 81% of manufacturers believe their revenue will increase in 2018, with 72% eyeing organic growth in the U.S. as their primary opportunity to increase sales.
- Manufacturers are more optimistic about the regional and national economy than the global economy, yet notably the optimism rating for all three has increased by more than 10 points since the 2017 outlook.
- 62% of manufacturers expect their sectors to grow, more than doubling the 2017 outlook; food and beverage and construction materials cite the highest optimism for sector growth.
- Manufacturers' top three priorities are growing sales, cutting costs, and addressing the talent gap.
- As in past years, labor remains a significant challenge. More than half of survey participants cited the labor shortage as the greatest risk or barrier to growth, and more than half of manufacturers expect to increase hiring.
- Respondents plan to utilize technology to reduce risks and build a competitive advantage; 75% said that they will investigate/prioritize cybersecurity in 2018, and 50% will investigate/prioritize Big Data/ERP/IoT.

Despite the improved outlook, hurdles remain. The dichotomy of growing sales while cutting costs may

also present a challenge. Through all the potential changes, working with a team of industry-experienced advisors to provide insight and answers continues to be critically important.

About Blue and Co.

Blue & Co., LLC is an independent accounting and advisory firm with more than 450 people in 13 offices across Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and Texas. With over 45 years of experience, Blue & Co.'s public accounting expertise includes the practice areas of assurance, tax compliance and consulting, healthcare consulting, benefit plan services, valuation and litigation support, and business services. Its industry specializations include manufacturing & distribution, healthcare, construction, nonprofit, technology, financial services organizations, and agribusiness. Blue & Co. also assists its clients with many different accounting software packages by providing installation, training, conversion and process improvement consulting.

For more information, please visit www.blueandco.com.

About LEA Global

Founded in 1999, LEA Global is the second largest international association in the world, creating a high-quality alliance of 220 firms focused on accounting, financial and business advisory services. LEA Global firms operate in 107 countries, giving clients of LEA Global firms access to the knowledge, skills and experience of over 2,000 experts and nearly 23,000 staff members.

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