

# Buckentin to lead Metals Innovation Initiative

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By **Don Sergent** (<https://bgdailynews.com/author/donsergent/>).



He led Russellville’s Logan Aluminum through a period of rapid growth, now Mike Buckentin aims to do the same for the fledgling Bowling Green-based nonprofit Metals Innovation Initiative (MI2).

Buckentin, Logan Aluminum’s CEO for seven years before his retirement in October 2024, has been named CEO of the MI2 organization that was formed in 2022 with a mission of promoting Kentucky as a destination for innovation in the metals industry.

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From its base in Western Kentucky University’s Innovation Campus on Nashville Road, the infant organization has quickly gone from a crawl to a full-on sprint under the leadership of founding CEO Vijay Kamineni, who was on loan from Logan Aluminum.

Kamineni, who will now become MI2’s chief innovation officer, has helped the nonprofit grow from its original eight member companies to more than 20 and has seen MI2 earn a U.S. Department of Energy innovation prize for its energy and talent initiatives.

“Our membership is expanding,” Kamineni said. “That’s why we created this new position (innovation officer). That’s my passion. Mike was retiring from Logan Aluminum, and he’s well-connected in the industry. He believes in what we’re doing and sees the value in it.”

Buckentin, in fact, served on MI2’s board of directors from its founding. He sees his new role as a natural transition from his leadership of Logan Aluminum.

“Logan Aluminum is one of those companies that is always willing to look outside and see how it can be part of the state and region,” Buckentin said. “It is very well-known, so I have been able to develop relationships with Frankfort.

“I hope to be able to translate that into work that needs to be done by MI2. We need to work with the General Assembly on manufacturing in general and metals in particular to address concerns with the workforce, energy, and raw materials.”

While Buckentin builds support for MI2 through those connections, Kamineni aims to focus more on promoting the innovation and education that can help Kentucky build on an already-robust metals industry.

“In Kentucky, the metals industry in general is thriving and providing well-paying jobs,” Kamineni said. “Metals jobs in Kentucky have grown by 12% over the last three years while declining nationwide.

“Kentucky has a lot of opportunity to grow in metals through research and innovation projects with universities. Also, the recycling side can grow. The environmental part is important, but recycled scrap can also provide a raw material source.”

Kamineni says the relationship with WKU is a “huge positive” for MI2, which is also working with researchers at the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky. Future education-related initiatives may be even broader, he says.

“Going forward, we’ll look at partnerships with middle and high schools to generate interest in metals in the next generation,” he said.

“Kids coming out of high school don’t know much about manufacturing,” Buckentin echoed. “A direct connection to those schools needs to be made. That’s where we’re going to get a lot of entry-level workers.”

While larger metals-related companies like Logan Aluminum, Kobe Aluminum, and Bowling Green Metalforming are already on board with MI2, Buckentin says the organization is looking to add members that maybe aren’t so well-known.

“We’re looking at smaller businesses, seeing how we can add value to them,” he said.

Buckentin aims to continue MI2’s outreach across the state through conferences and trainings. The nonprofit is already planning for October’s 2025 Kentucky Industry Conference to be held in Lexington in partnership with the Kentucky Association of Manufacturers and the University of Louisville Manufacturing Extension Program.