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12 projects approved to overhaul economy

Group aims to shift base from manufacturing to knowledge.

Joy Davia
Staff writer

(October 25, 2006) — A partnership charged with repositioning the local economy has so far approved 12 projects, which range from bolstering the skills of entrepreneurs to identifying companies that might be at risk of leaving the area.

The projects are the first by the Finger Lakes Partnership, a group of business, government, philanthropic and academic leaders who are implementing the federal WIRED initiative, which stands for Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development.

The Rochester region was one of 13 nationally to win \$15 million in WIRED funds earlier this year. The partnership will raise an additional \$22 million for the initiative.

The goal is to help move the economy from its longtime manufacturing base to one that's more knowledge-based.

Officials will focus on improving worker training in fields such as

To learn more

For more information on the Finger Lakes Partnership, go to www.fingerlakeswired.com.

Moving ahead

Here are the 12 projects approved by the governing board of the Finger Lakes Partnership:

- Master of science degree in science and technology commercialization, which will address the shortage of people who can look at a technology and determine whether it can be commercialized.
- Entrepreneurship and strategic growth immersion sequence program, which will target managers who want to join commercialization teams. Will also target existing and potential entrepreneurs.
- The Entrepreneurs Network, a six-month

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optics and biotechnology and furthering the skills of entrepreneurs.

Matt Hurlbutt, managing director of the partnership, said after a Rochester Workforce Investment Board meeting Tuesday that many of the 12 programs are getting ready for implementation. Another 11 initiatives are being reviewed, including a program to get private industries to work more collaboratively with each other — even with competitors. By collaborating, industry will be better able to identify regional gaps, opportunities and resources.

"It's all about changing the culture," Hurlbutt said.

John Twomey, executive director of the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals, told the board that the WIRED money puts the Rochester region "ahead of the curve" in preparing for change.

And changes will be plentiful. Twomey said the typical worker in the future will have 10 to 14 careers, with an average job lasting three to five years. Few of the jobs that will be most in demand in a few years even exist today, he said.

Twomey outlined six factors that will lead to major upheaval for the economy, both regionally and nationally:

- Baby boomer retirements.
- Demographic shifts, including a growing diversity of the work force.
- Increased payoff on educational attainment.
- Global competitors' actions.
- Immigration issues.
- The continuing impacts of outsourcing jobs and technological changes.

As the boomers retire, more workers will be needed and they will have to be skilled, Twomey said. But the United States is falling behind countries such as China and India, which produce more four-year college graduates, and even Ireland and Canada, which have larger percentages of their populations graduating from college.

program that will include boot camps and workshops.

- Pre-seed workshops, which will help assess business potential for specific inventions.
- Small business outreach and access, which will educate entrepreneurs and small business owners about funding opportunities and other types of assistance.
- Tech commercialization process, which will help accelerate the commercialization of university and company technologies.
- Scholarship fund, which will address skilled worker shortages in industries such as alternative energy, biotechnology, optics and imaging, and other fields.
- Regional apprentice system, which will start several new education/training programs for certain industry clusters.
- Education internships, which will place teachers in industry as a way to help forge a link between high-tech and emerging industries and educators, schools and employers.
- Predictive analysis/business attraction, which will help develop an understanding of assets in targeted clusters.
- Predictive analysis/retention and expansion, which will identify companies with a high likelihood of expansion or contraction, so economic development resources are better focused.
- Finger Lakes Resource Network, which will develop a Web portal to better connect regional economic and work force development efforts.

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Officials will have to work on eliminating the performance and graduation-rate gaps between white and minority students, he added, especially since almost half of the U.S. work force will likely be nonwhite by 2050.

The WIRED initiative covers nine counties: Monroe, Orleans, Genesee, Wyoming, Livingston, Ontario, Wayne, Seneca and Yates.

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