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## Finger Lakes WIRED initiative highlights success

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A four-year federally funded economic development program has wrapped up, with regional business leaders reporting Monday on several successes during the initiative.

Finger Lakes WIRED, which stands for Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development, was started with a \$15 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

The grant expired in November, and business leaders met Monday at the RIT Inn and Conference Center in Henrietta to showcase success stories.

Grant money went to 23 civic, work force development and educational organizations in the nine-county region and helped the region work together, said Peter Robinson, chief operating officer of the University of Rochester Medical Center and chairman of WIRED.

One of the programs established was the "Strategic Growth and Leadership" class at Rochester Institute of Technology, which helped owners of small- and medium-sized businesses to attend class for four hours a week.

Christine M. Vargas, owner of the project management firm Vargas Associates Inc. in Rochester, said the class helped her business devise ways to expand. She said daily duties of CEOs often are so time-consuming that inadequate attention is paid to strategy and growth.

Overall, WIRED officials said they trained 132 Rochester-area executives to expand their businesses, as well as 8,400 workers from 305 companies. They also consulted with 1,100 entrepreneurs in high technology sectors and developed four local college courses.

Officials said the work will continue.

"I think this was just the beginning of the collaboration," said Mark Peterson, CEO of Greater Rochester Enterprise. He said GRE benefited from the grant by updating its commercial property database. Using that data, the economic development organization increased corporate site-selection visits to the Rochester area to 24 in 2009, up from single digits.

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