



Talent Plus Opportunity: Fort Wayne's Community Foundation Promotes Both

For years—long before the most recent economic recession—many in the Fort Wayne area could see the trend. It wasn't pretty. In the mid-20th century, thanks to major manufacturers who provided good salaries and benefits to workers, the region had a high level of per capita income. But by the 1980s those good times were fading into memory as Rust Belt reality hit home, not just for Northeast Indiana, but also for neighboring communities and through much of the Great Lakes region of the United States.

Bruce Menshy, director of operations for Raytheon Co. in Fort Wayne, is also a project partner for the education initiative that aims for a workforce with possibilities of finding a future in Northeast Indiana's crowded defense and aerospace industries. **OPPOSITE:** David J. Bennett (center), executive director of the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne, and Leonard Helfrich (right), executive director of the \$20 million TOPS initiative, confer with Dennis Sherman, professor of advanced manufacturing in the New Technology Center on the Ivy Tech-Northeast campus.

Rising unemployment rates, consistently above the state and U.S. averages, as well as declining wages and personal incomes, signaled an oncoming crisis. The local economy depended on traditional manufacturing jobs—an increasingly precarious basis for sustaining any community—with a workforce largely unprepared for anything else.

All of Northeast Indiana—an 11-county area that encompasses urban Fort Wayne as well as rural areas like the picturesque Amish country of LaGrange County—has seen hard times.

“One key statistic that had many leaders concerned was that over the last 20 years our region had fallen behind in terms of per capita income compared to the rest of the country,” explains David J. Bennett, executive director of the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne. “The loss of personal income doesn't bode well for our region.”

A trend that took decades to build can't be reversed overnight, but Community Partnerships, an affiliate of Fort Wayne's community foundation, along with the Northeast Indiana Foundation and a broad base of partners in industry, education, economic development and government, are working on a long-term strategic solution called Talent Opportunity Success 2015 (TOpS), also known as the Talent Initiative.

With a three-year, \$20 million grant from Lilly Endowment, TOpS is designed to help enable the region to take fuller advantage of the strength it has in the defense and aerospace industries. The grant funds will be used largely to upgrade the region's human capital by developing and fostering a better-educated and trained workforce.

whether there were compelling opportunities in their regions that they could help exploit if the Endowment provided funding to do so.

The Endowment made its first grant to support such an endeavor late in 2007 in Columbus, Ind.—a \$38 million initiative called Economic Opportunities 2015. The grantees—the Heritage Fund of Bartholomew County and the Columbus Learning Center Management Corp.—and their community partners in education and economic development are capitalizing on the presence of manufacturers like Cummins and Honda Motor Co. to raise the educational attainment and economic status of the region's residents by preparing a new generation and retraining many in the existing workforce for high-skilled jobs in advanced manufacturing.

Like the Columbus area, Northeast Indiana has economic challenges, but it also has opportunities to grow its economy. "Before this initiative came along, we really didn't see anything to stop the downward trend," Bennett says. "The Endowment grant is really a strategic, long-term investment in Northeast Indiana."

Building a pipeline of talent

As its centerpiece, TOpS calls for

leveraging the region's significant defense and aerospace industry cluster, which boasts more than 160 contractors and suppliers. Despite the general economic

downturn, this industry cluster has continued to grow in Northeast Indiana, with \$2 billion in U.S. Department of Defense contracts in 2005-06 and the potential for 5,000 new and replacement high-tech, high-wage jobs for the region during the next five years.

Defense and aerospace contractors BAE Systems, General Dynamics, ITT Communications Systems, Northrop Grumman and Ultra Electronics are already among the area's largest employers, with at least 4,300 systems and software engineers, managers,



Capitalizing on community foundations

Through five phases and nearly 19 years of the Endowment initiative called Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT), the number of community foundations in Indiana has increased from approximately 12 in 1990 to at least one in each of Indiana's 92 counties. To encourage community foundations to play more central roles in community advancement, the Endowment in 2007 began asking community foundations in selected areas of the state to think about

technicians and other highly educated workers.

“The nature of the business means that the Northeast Indiana cluster has operated a bit under the radar,” says Bennett, a lifelong Fort Wayne resident who admits that he was surprised by just how much muscle there was in the defense industry’s local impact.

“Lilly Endowment encouraged us to do our homework and determine what our most compelling opportunities and needs were,” says Bennett. He and his colleagues had countless conversations with business, education and civic leaders in the region, studied a variety of reports on economic and demographic data, consulted state leaders and representatives of Conexus, the state’s advanced manufacturing and logistics initiative conducted under the auspices of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership Foundation and partially funded by the Endowment. “When our region’s leaders looked at the statistics and considered all the other input we received, we realized that the defense and aerospace industry was the obvious focus for our initiative,” he says.

“For a region our size to have the industry we have, it’s really rather amazing,” says Bruce Menshy, a TOPS project partner and director of operations for Raytheon Co., an international defense and aerospace contractor



A high-five for Lakeland High School: Teacher Stephanie Burdick (left) and Risa Herber, Lakeland superintendent, look forward to fall 2010 when the rural school in LaGrange County will become Leading EDGE (Engage, Develop, Grow, Excel), a New Tech high school. Grant funding will help establish five New Tech high schools in Northeast Indiana with concentration in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum.

with 75,000 employees worldwide, including 1,200 in Fort Wayne.

Employees in the defense industry in Fort Wayne are important players in U.S. defense efforts worldwide, according to Menshy. Engineers at either Raytheon or ITT designed much of the tactical communications technology used by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan, he notes.

When they are pondering expansion, companies like Raytheon factor in the availability of talent in the areas to be developed, Menshy says. In many cases, it’s not “if” defense and aerospace contractors are expanding, but just where those jobs will land.

“They put them where they can find the talent,” Menshy says. “The Fort Wayne region must continue to develop its talent base if it hopes to have competitive differentiation with other places. Like every other employer, we in the defense industry are dealing with demographic issues—an aging baby boomer base of employees—and we need to ensure that we have a pipeline of talent coming in.”

To feed that pipeline, the architects of the initiative chose to focus on four strategies:

- retrain the existing adult workforce for advanced manufacturing jobs;
- enhance advanced manufacturing programs at Ivy Tech Community College-Northeast;
- develop engineering talent for the region at Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne (IPFW);
- prepare K-12 students for a knowledge-based economy.

Since the Endowment grant was approved in early 2009, significant progress has been made, says Leonard Helfrich, a Fort Wayne attorney hired in September as executive director of the initiative.

“Our most immediate need is to upgrade the workforce,” says Helfrich. “We have people out of work now who have a background in manufacturing, but they must upgrade their skills. While these programs have



been designed with the defense and aerospace industries in mind, they also are relevant to the needs of employers in any sector of advanced manufacturing.”

The Endowment grant includes \$5.7 million for retraining adult workers through WorkOne Northeast, a state-government agency, with its partners at Ivy Tech-Northeast, IPFW and the Indiana Institute of Technology, a local independent college specializing in engineering, computer science and business.

Endowment funds mean that WorkOne can be more creative in its approach. For example, the agency has partnered with Ivy Tech to provide unemployed workers with advanced manufacturing and high-tech certification in just six or eight weeks. The process would normally require a semester or two to complete, Helfrich says.

With its \$2.6 million share of the Endowment grant, Ivy Tech was able to purchase state-of-the-art equipment for the advanced manufacturing labs in its new Technology Center on the Ivy Tech campus. It consulted industry leaders to ensure the equipment was widely used in industry settings, according to Russell Baker, interim chancellor of Ivy Tech-Northeast.

“We have a lot of people in this area who have been

Helfrich ponders the way forward for the initiative that holds such promise for the future of the area’s communities.

working in manufacturing of one type or another, but their jobs may have disappeared or are at least in jeopardy,” Baker says. “Now our community college can train people proactively for the manufacturing jobs of tomorrow on cutting-edge equipment.”

At IPFW a \$4.5 million share of the Endowment grant will endow academic chairs in the systems engineering graduate program and at the Wireless Technology Center, where the grant also will help establish a new wireless research lab.

The center—established in 2007 with a gift from ITT Corp. to help support the local defense industry with research and teaching activities—is helping raise Fort Wayne’s profile as a hub of advanced training and research in wireless technology.

In 2009 the center hosted a wireless “summer school” and attracted 82 professionals from the defense industry as well as students. Business agreements have been struck with startup companies in the U.S. and Europe. “The opportunities seem nearly limitless, given the multibillion dollar wireless communications



Lakeland High School freshmen got a taste of the New Tech program this year when they made movies—very short movies—using the technology at hand for filming, writing, editing, producing and directing. Superintendent Herber (below) agrees to an interview. She, along with teachers and board members, did outside reading and consulted education leaders at the University of Indianapolis about New Tech high schools.

industry. These things would not have happened without the Lilly Endowment grant,” says Todor Cooklev, the center’s director.

Giving students the edge

At the other end of the education spectrum, \$5 million of the Endowment grant for the initiative is dedicated to K-12 education. It will be used primarily to establish five New Tech high schools with concentration in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) curriculum.

New Tech is a national reform movement that focuses on project-based learning and encourages the use of new technologies in solving problems to teach 21st century workplace skills. Based on a school in Napa, Calif., the model has been replicated in communities across

the country, including some in Indiana.

TOPS calls for at least 1,000 students in five school systems to be enrolled in certified New Tech high schools with a STEM emphasis before 2012. When all the schools are up and running, they will make up the largest concentration of New Tech schools in Indiana.

Leading the way are urban schools like Wayne High School in Fort Wayne, which has 100 students already enrolled in its program, and the rural Lakeland School Corp. in LaGrange County, which will open its New Tech school called Leading EDGE (Engage, Develop,

Grow, Excel) in fall 2010.

Receiving funding to launch the New Tech high school in LaGrange County where Amish buggies are a common sight and the poverty rate is above the national



and state averages is “beyond amazing,” says Risa Herber, Lakeland School Corp. superintendent.

Students are being introduced to the new curriculum already during the 2009-10 school year. Beginning in the fall, 170 freshmen and 170 sophomores started the new program with the hope that the majority would earn the Leading EDGE diploma with its emphasis on STEM. Those who do will receive another bonus: 12 hours of college credit from any one of four Indiana colleges and universities.

Herber, school board members and teachers consulted the Endowment-funded Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning at the University of Indianapolis, which offers a range of programs to enhance K-12 education, including providing technical assistance for school districts establishing New Tech schools. They also visited New Tech high schools in California, Texas and Indiana to better understand the model.

At each school, Herber says she was struck by the universal enthusiasm of both students and teachers, although each setting was very different. Herber was impressed by how students worked together on projects, used technology with ease, and made presentations that showed confidence and the ability to communicate complicated concepts.

These skills are what students need in the real world, and they are immediately applicable to the workplace or to a college classroom, Herber says.

Seeds for change

How will Northeast Indiana know if the initiative is working?

Helfrich says some of the results will be quantifiable: solid employment gains, an increase in

the number of students enrolling in engineering programs, and a higher per capita income closer to the national average. Some results will be less easy to measure but just as important: Do all high school seniors in the region think they have to leave to have a better life? Is lifelong learning the expectation, not the exception?

“The Endowment grant is seed money to change the culture,” Menshy says. “It raises the bar of student performance and educational achievement. Not everyone is going to become an engineer, but there’s no reason why the bar can’t be raised for everyone.”

This initiative plays to natural strengths of the region: a good work ethic and a public-minded spirit that Menshy calls “the Midwestern thing.” In fact, a group of executives has formed the Northeast Indiana Defense Industry Association to help support the initiative and to cooperate for the good of the region.

“It’s our nature to cooperate,” he says. “What we needed was the impetus to help the community think more broadly. The Endowment grant is certainly a powerful incentive to collaborate and pool resources in a way that helps everyone.

“The \$20 million is huge, but TOPS’ real potential won’t be understood for years,” he adds. “Talent drives business, and that’s what we’re building here.”



Making movies from start to finish captivated Lakeland students. New Tech high schools focus on using technologies in project-based learning.