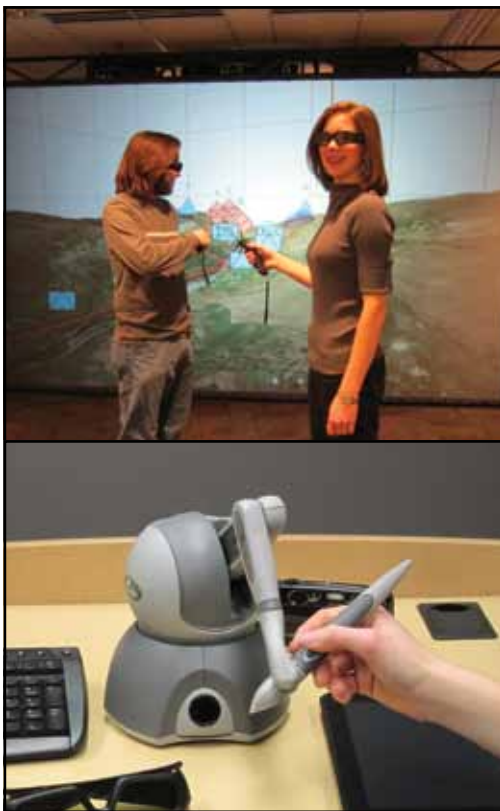


It's All About Talent Initiative Yields Progress in Northeast Region

Students at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne use 3D technology during a military simulation to manipulate and view terrain.



Surgeons can use haptic devices, which provide pressure sensations in virtual environments, to help detect tumors.

“If you have the talent pipeline, business will come.”

That’s how Bruce Menshy, director of operations at Raytheon – a global defense and aerospace systems company in Fort Wayne – sums up the Talent Initiative, focused on attracting STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) jobs to Northeast Indiana.

Established in 2009 with a \$20 million Lilly Endowment grant, the Talent Initiative emphasizes partnerships among education institutions (K-12 and postsecondary) and area businesses to increase the number of highly skilled workers in the defense/aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries. The collaboration encompasses 10 counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells and Whitley.

“Eventually, it will have an impact on the wages we pay in the region because we’ll have employees with the right skills,” Menshy asserts. “The best way to reinforce and develop those skills going forward is through collaboration between industry, government and educational institutions to make sure we’re all pulling together in the same direction.”

Talent Initiative Director Leonard Helfrich agrees.

“The defense industries are one of our biggest employers and demand a higher proportion of highly skilled workers than a lot of other industries,” he explains. “They’re engineers. They’re high-level managers – those are the kinds of jobs we want to create: high-skill, high-wage jobs.”

Mike Packnett, president and CEO of Parkview Health, is chair of the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership (the Partnership), which is leading the initiative.

“We’re in competition with locations around the world, not just around the Midwest, and if we don’t have that supply of talent, people are going to look elsewhere,” he declares. “We have to be very convincing in our ability to show folks what the talent pool is in Northeast Indiana.”

The Talent Initiative is an important piece of the Partnership’s Vision 2020 economic development plan, which includes “The Big Goal” – ensuring that 60% of Northeast Indiana residents earn a college degree (two- or four-year) or advanced certification by the year 2025. The current rate is under 35%. (The Big Goal is the national focus of the Indianapolis-based Lumina Foundation and part of the Indiana Chamber-led *Indiana Vision 2025* statewide strategy).

“That will transform our region more than anything else we do,” Packnett declares. “It’s come down to us developing, attracting and retaining talent. At the very core, that’s what we’re really about here.”

Making the (education) connection

The Talent Initiative emphasizes four key strategies: retraining adult workers, expanding regional engineering talent, upgrading education in advanced manufacturing and preparing K-12 students for a knowledge-based economy.

Helfrich points out that a partnership with WorkOne Northeast to train adult workers is helping set the region apart from competitors.

“We worked with industry to find out what skills they needed and worked with WorkOne to provide that particular skills training,” he recalls. “That became an economic tool because there were very few regions in the country doing incumbent training.”

The Talent Initiative also took employers into the classroom – literally.

Menshy and other business leaders worked closely with colleges such as Ivy Tech and Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) to help ensure that course material addresses industry needs.

“It gives students an opportunity to understand what industries are doing in the region, the kinds of careers available and the kinds of skills they need to work on to prepare them to enter these businesses,” he comments.

Talent Initiative funding enabled Ivy Tech to upgrade advanced manufacturing equipment at its Fort Wayne campus.

“In the past, students who were trying to learn how to run one of those machines would learn on a computer simulation; now they can stand by the equipment and learn how to use it,” Helfrich remarks. “It’s the equipment that the advanced manufacturers in our region are already using. They want employees trained on that equipment.”

In addition, IPFW established an Information Analytics and Visualization Center that features information processing, data mining, virtual reality technology and more.

Younger students also are taking a closer look at STEM-related careers. Six New Tech high schools were created to emphasize project-based learning. Curriculum revolves around areas such as oral and written communication, teamwork, creativity and presentation skills.

“I think it’s going to help those students be better prepared to be successful in college and to be a great supply of talent for the region,” Packnett shares. “Not only in the defense industry, but certainly the math and science engineering curriculum is absolutely vital for the health care industry as well.

“Health care has grown significantly in Northeast Indiana over the last few years and having enough talent for us has been vital as well. The partnership we’ve had with the community – including education institutions, employers and other health care providers – I haven’t seen that kind of collaboration in any other market that I’ve been in.”

What’s next?

Although the Talent Initiative’s original goals have been accomplished, more work remains.

One challenge is continuing to adapt to changing technology.

“I think advanced manufacturing requires skills that are at a higher level than employees had in the past (such as) the ability to understand computers,” Menshy contends. “It’s a transition from what we used to be.

“We had a lot of assembly and manufacturing in the region. We still have General Motors and BF Goodrich (and other companies) that are vital parts of the region’s industry, but we need to make sure we enhance the skills.”

That’s why partnerships between business and education are so important.



New Tech students (top) apply project-based learning skills. An instructor (left) programs machinery while a student takes a closer look at equipment in the advanced manufacturing lab at Ivy Tech’s Fort Wayne campus.

“We’re working together as a community, working with education partners and making sure they’re delivering educational opportunities that really mesh into the state-of-the-art of industry,” Menshy proclaims.

Packnett echoes that sentiment.

“Building on the relationships that have formed over the last few years – I think there’s a lot of momentum in this area,” he shares. “I’m very encouraged by the conversations that continue to take place, the goal setting we’re talking about as we continue to work on those key metrics that are important for us as we go all the way from early childhood through college completion.

“I’m excited by what the Lilly grant has helped begin here in Northeast Indiana and think we’ll see the fruits and dividends of those efforts for generations to come.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Leonard Helfrich, Talent Initiative, at www.talentmadehere.com

Bruce Menshy, Raytheon, at www.raytheon.com

Mike Packnett, Parkview Health, at www.parkview.com