

## **Testimony**

### **HOUSE COMMERCE COMMITTEE HEARING**

**MARCH 11, 2010, WILLIAMSPORT, PA**

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & JOB CREATION**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

##### **A. Description of Project**

The North Central Pennsylvania Technology Futures Organization (Tech Futures) will be a business membership organization that will be united under a shared vision for technology advancement and technology-based economic development in north central Pennsylvania. The objective of the Tech Futures will be to grow the regional economy by creating a business environment in North-central Pennsylvania that will attract, retain and grow small to mid-size technology companies.

Activities of the TECH FUTURES will include establishing a regional web portal for technology-based businesses and organization, organizing and conducting regional technology events, enhancing student internship programs and placements in regional technology businesses, supporting and guiding the strategy for retaining and attracting technology-based businesses and facilitating the development of new business-to-business relationships and international sales in the region for technology companies.

##### **B. Market Need**

Historically, North-central Pennsylvania has been viewed primarily as a rural community where agriculture, wood products, recreation and tourism are the primary economic drivers. However, a closer look reveals a much more diversified economic community with a strong technology base which has many of the factors that are important for the growth and prosperity of a region.

These regional factors include technology-based manufacturing, information technology, telecommunications, education and economic development organizations. The key to leveraging the resources within these organizations is to create a technology community which not only engages the technology organizations in the region, but also reaches out to the general community to support the growth and development of the region.

##### **C. Anticipated Results of Project**

This project will result in the creation of a dynamic technology-based and business-lead membership organization who will reshape and rebrand the region as a technology-rich community. Through this repositioning the regional will see an increase in the growth and retention of technology-based business and jobs as well as an increase in the number of new technology companies in the region.

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The Greater Williamsport Technology Futures Organization was formed in 2005 by a group of local technology businesses to explore ways of growing technology-based businesses in the region. The early meetings of a smaller ad-hoc group is now growing into a substantial number of interested technology-based organizations who have determined that there must now be put into place dedicated organizational resources. These dedicated resources are critical to continue the initial growth and success of the Tech Futures Organization and move from a small community initiative to a regional initiative which can have real impact for the entire North-central Pennsylvania region.

***The objective of the Technology Futures Organization of North Central Pennsylvania will be to grow the regional economy by creating a business environment in North-central Pennsylvania that will attract, retain and grow small to mid-size technology companies.***

This is an ambitious objective and additional resources are needed to successfully move the organization from a local to a self-supporting regional initiative, and to achieve the scale of activity and impact that is needed to advance technology-based economic development agenda of North-central Pennsylvania.

In order to meet the overall objective major activities of the Technology Futures Organization of Central Pennsylvania (Tech Futures) will include the following:

### **1. Networking and Business-to-Business Communication**

The North Central Pennsylvania Technology Futures Organization is united under a shared vision for technology advancement and economic development. The focus of the North Central Pennsylvania Technology Futures Organization will be to bring together people who have a vital interest in moving the region forward through innovation. Innovation often occurs when people step out of their comfort zone and speak with other innovators. Tech futures provides a context for businesses to learn about each other, band together for needed business environment change and understand what the community and region has to offer in terms of services and products, both public sector and commercial. Tech Futures offers an incubator mentality but not just for start ups.

Achieving this development and exchange of ideas will be done by organizing networking events to include subject-based forums, an annual technology event and other events to bring technology professionals and businesses together.

## **2. Reshaping Economic Development and Regional Change Agent**

A surge of economic development is destined to impact the region. As the large cities on the East Coast look for alternative sources of power and safety, rural areas like central Pennsylvania will be targeted. Traditionally, economic developers in rural communities have used “cheap” land, low labor costs and subsidized infrastructure development as the major incentives for companies to relocate to their regions. It is critical that the technology leaders of the community educate and guide community leaders to a new vision of what is important for technology companies, and that this region can support and grow technology businesses.

We are joining leaders of the community in areas such as downtown revitalization, workforce development and recruitment, broadband and finances to share ideas, success stories, and lessons learned. Our goal is to discover and design alternative business models for technology-based economic development versus property-based economic development.

## **3. Regional Rebranding**

The first Tech Futures conference occurred based on the concept that companies in the region do not know enough about each other. There is a sense of nothing going on here because we do not market to ourselves. Tech Futures presents the opportunity for us to look at ourselves differently, find partners where we would not have looked before, consider innovations we have never considered, and network globally through a significant technology-based community.

Tech Futures will also provide a basis for rebranding the region as a technology node where technology-based business can find the right resources and a technology network to support their business goals, while enjoying the amenities that can only be found in a rural area.

## **4. Create and Maintain an Innovative Public Website and Collaborative Website for Tech Futures Members and Business Partners**

The web has become an essential tool to bring together people from all over the world, across generations and technical skills. An innovative website is vital to the success of this organization and will be a central “place” for Tech Futures to carry out many of the organization’s activities. Areas that are being considered for a web-based solution are:

## **Internship program**

A vital element of Tech Futures is increasing interaction of students with the business community. Regional businesses are often not aware of innovation taking place in our communities. Consequently, we can't expect students to be aware of these activities or have an interest in staying in the region. A Tech Futures internship program offers a way for students to get exposure to the best companies in the region. One internship program will focus on having students design and implement a leading edge website that will give our community a feel of up and coming events and the technology capacity in the region. The Website can be used as an important tool for promoting opportunities and matching interns with technology-based internships.

## **Advertisement and External Communications**

The website will offer advertising for a fee, contributing to the self-sustaining business model for Tech Futures.

## **Community Knowledge Management**

The region needs a better way to manage our knowledge - especially knowledge that is import for technology workers or companies. Any technology worker or company considering moving to this region should be able to plan out a career path or activities for any member of the family - from pre-school elementary school extra-curricular activities outside recreation college professional employers. They should also be able to review an inventory of all the technology resources that are in the community to include educational institutions, technology businesses, and technology-based economic development organizations.

## **Talent Pool**

The website will be a place for educational institutions and workforce organizations, such as the CareerLinks, to advertise their talent. Understanding the talent in the area will be vital to the success of the recruited technology companies.

## **5. Supply Chain Analysis and Supplier Support**

Tech Futures plans to offer supply chain analysis services to regional companies and support in locating vendors, with an emphasis on local and regional vendors. Tech futures will also determine how companies in this region could be better served – and work to turn those needs into companies.

Tech Futures will also evaluate and develop an understanding of the talent pool of recently graduated students, long time residents, traveling spouses, and natives returning to the area. Understanding regional needs, the talent pool and public sector resources will help inspire innovation and present opportunities for technology economic development.

The original Tech Futures was formed in response to local technology business seeing the need to identify ways to recruit and retain talented technology workers in a rural community. In the process of analyzing the conditions and factors that were important in achieving this goal, it became apparent the problem was much more complex than simply recruiting and retaining talent. The problem included other factors such as a negative perception of the region for being a desirable place for a technology company to grow and succeed the lack of an active technology community and the lack of understanding of the important role that technology and the technology community can play in setting the region's economic development strategy.

The benefits of this organization include:

- Technology business retention
- New technology business recruitment
- New technology company creation
- Job retention
- Job creation
- Increased sales
- Regional business-to-business sales
- International sales
- Student intern job placement
- Student job offers
- Improved community perception of North-central PA as a technology region as measured by media references