



Lake County, Ohio

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PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: January 16, 2020

Lake County Agencies Collaboration Wins Transportation Grant from Paradox Prize Project

(LAKE COUNTY, OH) -- The Lake County Board of Commissioners realizes that economic development is a twofold challenge. While attracting new businesses is paramount, providing an adequate workforce for the existing businesses is also a growing concern in our County.

In recent months, Lake County officials have collaborated with two large manufacturers in Mentor—Lincoln Electric and Component Repair Technologies (CRT)—to develop a thoughtful approach to connect people from low-income areas of the region to opportunities at these companies. “Our office is excited to bring together our local manufacturing businesses and help them tap a new pool of talent for their workforce” said John Hamercheck, President of the Lake County Board of Commissioners.

“Attracting and retaining prospective employees from East Cleveland is a priority for Lincoln Electric and providing an efficient and cost effective commute to our facilities is important for long-term success,” commented Kelly Kehn, Director of Human Resources at Lincoln Electric.

Similar transportation-related issues are not limited to Lincoln Electric. CRT has long-standing relationships with Max Hayes High School, Richmond Heights High School, Thomas W. Harvey High School and Painesville schools through its S.O.A.R. (Student Opportunities in Aviation Repair) program, which provides training to students for jobs in the aerospace industry, then offers full-time employment to those who successfully complete the program and graduate from high school. Despite this benefit to both student and employer, limited access to automobile or public transportation has posed several issues. “The S.O.A.R. program has already proven to be an excellent bridge for high school students to begin a career in aviation but we have also seen in several cases, the barrier that transportation can pose to a student’s success,” says John Gallagher, Human Resources Manager at Component Repair Technologies.

To combat these problems relating to transportation accessibility, the Lake County Commissioners, along with the Lake County Ohio Port and Economic Development Authority and Laketrans, have created a pilot project that connects workers with Lake County jobs. “It’s my priority to encourage our staff and our partner agencies to assist our Lake County businesses in development of their workforces,” said Commissioner Ron Young.

Laketrans, Lake County’s public transit agency, provides traditional commuter transit service from Cleveland to Eastlake and Mentor, but its service hours are limited to first shift.

“With the Paradox Prize grant, Laketrans will provide direct service between Euclid and Mentor Lincoln Electric locations so current and potential employees can access jobs in Mentor that they may not have previously considered, because they have no way to get there,” explained Laketrans CEO Ben Capelle. “For Component Repair Technologies, we envision an on-demand van service that improves student access to the SOAR program.”

Capelle continued, “The participation of the employers is key in the success of this grant. By understanding the unique challenges for these businesses, we are able to create custom solutions to help them recruit and retain qualified employees.”

“With this pilot, we hope to learn if demand response transportation is an effective and affordable solution for employees and employers to get people to jobs here in Lake County. If successful, we will have a model of how a public-private transportation solution can support local workforce development.”

Lake County Commissioner Jerry Cirino commented, “Our unemployment rate is historically low at 2.8% and Lake County employers need to recruit from talent pools in surrounding counties to keep business growing. I applaud our staff, Laketrans, and the Port Authority for their vision and creativity to create solutions to get qualified employees to places where they can work. I also want to recognize CRT for continually innovating how they recruit, train, and retain their workforce.”

This project is funded through a \$75,000 grant from the Fund for Our Economic Future, a philanthropic organization focused on job readiness and access.

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