



JobsNow Initiative Wins Mid-America EDC's Workforce Development Award

The Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber in Ohio was awarded the Mid-America EDC Workforce Development Award for their JobsNow Workforce Initiative. Upon hearing businesses express the need for workforce attraction, skills training and candidate drug testing support, the Chamber created the JobsNow Initiative with the goal of closing the gap between skilled workers and in-demand positions, as well as breaking barriers to employment. Their Initiative has helped local businesses to hire skilled and capable workers, solving pressing workforce challenges in the process.

The JobsNow Initiative takes a multi-pronged approach to workforce development

The JobsNow Workforce Initiative assists both employers and jobseekers by raising the awareness of available positions in the Mahoning Valley, while also focusing on necessary skills within those occupations. Additionally, the initiative helps to alleviate the burden of failed drug tests and provides support for out of area applicants to move to Ohio's Mahoning Valley.

To help achieve their goals, the Chamber established a partnership with WKBN, a local CBS affiliate. Together, they are raising awareness about employment opportunities in the Mahoning Valley. By creating personalized stories and videos to be broadcast weekly, the JobsNow Initiative has exposed 250,000 people to in-demand jobs, while connecting them with hiring managers.

Once applicants apply for an available position, the JobsNow Initiative can pay for drug screening to be completed by Steward Health Care. Ken Timmings, Manager of KTSDI, said of the drug testing, "It has allowed our small dynamic

company the opportunity to pretest potential candidates in all job areas. The Chamber's drug testing program has allowed us to prescreen and test candidates before final job offer. It has been a nice addition to our recruitment process." When one of those applications comes from a qualified candidate living outside of the area, the JobsNow Initiative can help to attract them to the Mahoning Valley. They have created a metropolitan profile and relocation resources that can help candidates in their decision-making process. For example, the Chamber offers executive tours to support the job seeker's decision making process when considering a move to the Mahoning Valley. They also provide an overall community and economic development tour to include investment in the area, so that the individual can see all that the market has to offer, including industry growth. In addition, the Chamber offers housing support that makes it easier to move.

The JobsNow Initiative provides businesses with a holistic workforce development solution, beginning by helping businesses to attract workers to screening and relocation support. This approach is enabling local businesses to grow.

Businesses are benefiting from their efforts

Since the Initiative launched in 2016, they have aired more than 450 segments which have been viewed by over 250,000 people. This has led to an increase in qualified applicants applying for positions in the area. "JobsNow helped us fill several positions! After our segment aired, we received 60 applications, many of which were highly skilled. The partnership between the Regional Chamber, WKBN, and Steward WorkMed is a valuable business service," said Dale Ann Foerster, HR Manager at Starr Manufacturing.

They have also provided over ninety free drug tests since 2018, saving businesses the cost associated with screening candidates. This cost-saving measure has been helpful for employers who were spending a significant amount of time and resources on drug screening.

The JobsNow Initiative has also provided customized packages designed to aid people and businesses looking to relocate to the Mahoning Valley.

What other communities can learn from the JobsNow Initiative

Creating unique solutions for the local business community is critical. When meeting with businesses, the Chamber's business development managers discovered that many local companies could expand except for the lack of employees to operate machinery on new production lines. Rather than approaching businesses with a pre-formed solution, the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber staff listened to their needs *and then* developed the Initiative.

These initial listening sessions were critical because they highlighted specific challenges that could be addressed by the Chamber. Some of them were surprising. For example, companies in the area were feeling frustrated by the drug screening process. Though not generally included in a workforce attraction campaign, offering to pay for drug screening allowed the Chamber to provide immediate and tangible assistance to businesses, addressing a pressing concern in the process. "Something that's been beneficial and has worked well for us is listening and following up with timely, tangible resources. Companies are so busy running their business, they don't have time to track down resources for retention and growth. We are here to provide and connect them with resources so that they can focus on running their business," said Marcy Angelo, Manager, Business Development for the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber.

Creating the JobsNow Initiative presented its own unique set of challenges such as securing funding, finding the right healthcare partner to complete drug screenings, establishing a media partnership and securing the right users for JobsNow. Still, by pressing forward and being innovative, the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber has developed and implemented a workforce development program that is serving the needs of their community and encouraging its growth. The Mid-America EDC congratulates them on their efforts and on winning this year's Workforce Development Award.

To learn more about the JobsNow Initiative, contact:

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Pictures

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