

## It's all about making connections

Two years ago when TechColumbus projected its membership would reach 1,000 by the end of the decade, some thought it a bold prediction. But the numbers tell it all, and TechColumbus' membership has soared from 200 companies in 2007 to over 475 as of this month – an increase of more than 100 percent.

"In November of 2007, we boldly said we'd get to the 1,000-member mark by the end of 2010. Having grown to 475 member companies as of this month, we are well on our way," said Tim Haynes, Vice President of Marketing and Membership Services for TechColumbus.

Haynes credits the organization's breadth of membership benefits for its success in recruiting members. In existence just over three years, TechColumbus has steadily built brand awareness along with membership through over 140 events and programs, a range of marketing tools that help companies increase their visibility, an innovative group health insurance plan, an expanded expertise partner program for connecting companies to service providers and new member programs for startups and small professional services organizations.

People, companies, technology, funding, talent and services – it's all about making connections, Haynes says. Bringing new opportunities to the region's tech community, TechColumbus collaborates and partners with organizations such as The Columbus Chamber and other chambers throughout the region, the National Association of Women Business Owners, OSU, Columbus State University and the Small Business Development Center, BioOhio, Columbus TechLife, IT Martini, OSU Business Builders Club and the PEP Talks among others.

TechColumbus' membership reach extends throughout the Central Ohio community, from startups run by a sole proprietor, to large corporations such as Sterling Commerce and Mount Carmel Health System with hundreds of employees.

While small companies, startups, major corporations and individual entrepreneurs may be a diverse group, they all have one thing in common – they're eager for networking and connections with people and resources that will help them advance their goals in their field and the community at large.

"The big factor in why we're making such tremendous progress – even during these challenging times – is that we're targeting segments of the technology community with focused programs where people can network and enhance their business-building skills. All of these are designed to build on the momentum that's driving our region's technology sector," Haynes said.

Among those benefits are the executive and



TechColumbus programs provide opportunities to learn about job openings, best practices and the latest innovations.

peer forums designed to promote interaction and sharing of best practices, common business challenges and innovations among peers in different fields

Cindy Sheets, Senior Vice President of Ambulatory Services and Chief Information Officer at Mount Carmel Health in Columbus, participates in monthly CIO forums. About 35 CIOs from Central Ohio businesses attend the meetings. "The forums offer an opportunity to share ideas with people outside the health care industry," she said. "I get to hear and understand issues and challenges they are facing, and share in a noncompetitive environment. This is something I would not be able to engage in anywhere else."

Sheets said Mount Carmel became a member of TechColumbus for other reasons as well. "We



Cindy Sheets, Mount Carmel Health



Jim Hendrickson, Sterling Commerce



R.C. Wheelless, InsightETE

need to be associated with TechColumbus because of things going on in the Tech Corridor, of which we're a part," she said. "It's also a good way for us to help the community understand that we have highly sophisticated IT capabilities."

Jim Hendrickson, Vice President for Corporate Development at Dublin software giant Sterling Commerce, adds that TechColumbus membership is in keeping with his company's mission to encourage entrepreneurship. A TechColumbus member, Sterling Commerce also sponsors many TechColumbus events, including Startup Weekend and the Innovation Summit. "This close association gives us a natural synergy with the technology community," he said. "The success of TechColumbus goes beyond just the tech community – it's good for everyone in the region because it's promoting economic development through innovation."

Small companies also benefit from TechColumbus

membership, though in different ways. R.C. Wheelless, President and CEO of InsightETE in Columbus, says InsightETE, part of the TechColumbus incubator, evolved from a company that was close to insolvency in 2006 when he became CEO. "We've had three consistently profitable years and now we're positioned for growth when the economy picks up," he said.

In addition having mentoring and technical assistance at hand, the incubator offers proximity to peers and startups with similar challenges and issues. "I have access to other CEOs in similar surroundings. I can walk down the hall and grab a cup of coffee with them and talk about problems and best practices," Wheelless said.

Wheelless also cites access to potential clients, partners, investors and employees as advantages to being in the incubator and a member of TechColumbus. "It's hard to be successful if you're working in a vacuum."

### Responding to needs

TechColumbus adds new member benefits as needs arise. In addition to a group health insurance program started this year, two new networking programs are in the works – one designed to connect job seekers and employers; and one for OSU and other university students.

TechColumbus is currently developing plans to introduce a formal job networking program to be introduced later this year. There can't be too many initiatives that promote job networking, especially in this economy, says Dale Mitchell, who serves on the board of directors for Scioto Ridge Job Networking Group, a faith-based network in Dublin. "In as much as we can all work together, it benefits everyone," he said. "I've seen our job network make tremendous transformations in people's lives, so the more groups we have like this in Central Ohio, the better."

Reaching out to young innovators is another TechColumbus goal becoming a reality. OSU's Business Builder's Club is a group of about 70 college student entrepreneurs who meet weekly during the school year with the goal of connecting current and aspiring entrepreneurs with resources to build successful business and social ventures. TechColumbus is supporting and collaborating with the group on an upcoming event that will include an idea pitch competition and a job networking component.

"This will be much more than just a career fair – we're looking for people to build meaningful relationships through networking," said Luke Barbara, the group's incoming president for the 2009-2010 academic year. "This event will help us strengthen the bridge between TechColumbus and emerging talent of the student community in Central Ohio."

### Membership *Benefits*

- **Connect** with people who can help you grow your business.
- **Exchange** information between peers and share best practices.
- **Learn** through innovative programming, events and weekly news.
- **Promote** your company through event sponsorship.
- **Reach** tech talent through online postings in TechWeek and on the TechColumbus Web site.
- **Launch** your innovation into a new business with the help of entrepreneurial services and the incubator facility.
- **Network** with the top technology contributors in Central Ohio at annual events.

TechColumbus supports technology-based and technology-enabled enterprises at every stage of development. Membership is open to Central Ohio companies and organizations. Cost is determined by the number of full-time employees, who are included as members and welcome to attend events. For more information contact Leslyn Wheelless – [lwheelless@techcolumbus.org](mailto:lwheelless@techcolumbus.org)

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