

Growth Partnership joins the Business Resource Network

BY STEFANIE WESSELL

JEFFERSON - In its role of helping businesses expand, grow and locate in Ashtabula County, Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County listens to the concerns and desires of the businesses of the area.

A few years ago, Growth Partnership Project Manager Hattie L. Grubke-Barnard began meeting with local businesses one-on-one to discuss their challenges and successes and just take a pulse of the local community.

Grubke-Barnard describes the meetings as a way to remind the businesses of Growth Partnership - and vice versa.

"The amount of things we've learned from these visits has been amazing," Grubke-Barnard said.

During these meetings, the businesses learn about the services available to them.

Now Growth Partnership has taken this one step further by joining the Business Resource Network, which opens up the businesses to even more resources and help with their questions.

The Business Resource Network is a collaborate and growing group of the region's chambers of commerce, workforce and economic-development organizations, schools, colleges, universities, community organizations and government agencies that all offer some sort of business service to help employers and their staff solve problems.

The goal of the Business Resource Network is to help employers identify, understand and access the services their business needs. It's a statewide initiative, and area partners with Ashtabula County include Geauga and Portage counties.

"It's really a collaboration of local and regional resources working together to bring assistance to local businesses," Business Resource Network Manager Brenda Vogley said.

With one phone call, businesses can connect with dozens of re-

sources to help their business grow, have several experts working to help them meet a challenge and arrange for the delivery of a package of grants, loans, worker training and other resources custom-designed for them.

"We can talk to people in our partner counties and ask them questions about issues they're facing," Grubke-Barnard said.

Grubke-Barnard said the Business Resource Network is designed to be a "layoff-aversion method," with businesses reaching out for help before they reach that point. It's putting businesses together to serve each other.

Vogley said a U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Investment Fund grant has allowed the network to expand beyond assisting businesses facing layoffs to help any business looking for assistance or help with a problem.

How it works is, the account executive for a county (Grubke-Barnard, in Ashtabula County's case) contacts a business and arranges a visit, during which the account executive asks questions and gathers information. Information about what challenges the business is facing is taken back to the network.

The issues popping up the most are workforce-development issues dealing with hiring, training and retaining personnel, Vogley said.

"That's what we've found is an overreaching concern," Vogley said.

The network then reviews what resources are available to help and the account executive offers them to the business.

In these conversations, businesses realize that they're facing the same problems.

"We're not alone," Grubke-Barnard said.

Businesses can contact their area BRN at www.thebrn.net for more information about how the network can benefit them.

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