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Boeing expansion aims to keep graduates in Ohio

Partnership with OSU, C-TEC designed to prepare students to join Heath plant's workforce

Friday, July 11, 2008 6:43 PM

By **LORI WINCE**

ThisWeek Staff Writer

The Boeing Co.'s expansion in Heath that will include a Virtual Manufacturing Center (VMC) is expected to be a benefit to the city by creating jobs.

It also creates some interesting partnerships with local schools and could help keep educated students in their home state, Gov. Ted Strickland said while visiting the plant Thursday.

"OSU (Ohio State University) is really excited about their partnership with us," said James Rollen, Boeing's director of technology and applications.

Boeing is working with OSU's main campus to hire two interns to work with the VMC. Rollen said the students will provide bright, creative ideas to help the existing Boeing staff market the center to outside companies.

"They (OSU students) will help us grow," he said.

Boeing plans to hire two OSU interns this summer: one in August and one in September, said Gregory Afronien, Boeing's project designer.

Afronien said the VMC creates 3-dimensional models that could be projected into the center of a room. The models could help with Boeing's production of aerospace products, development of new buildings within the company and in supporting the country's major defense systems, he said. The models also could help other companies by projecting the way a new building or manufacturing system should be built -- before it's actually built -- to help designers work out any potential problems.

"It's (VMC) designed for the human factor," Afronien said. "So you can see where handles need to go (for example) and get a better understanding of how to build a product."

Anthony Panella, Boeing's business-development manager, said Boeing already supports OSU's engineering department, providing \$30,000 in scholarships.

Boeing also works with the Career and Technology Centers' (C-TEC) adult education program to train people for their workforce.

Kelly Wallace, director of C-TEC's adult education program, said 25 students recently completed a 120-hour class that included a special soldering certification used by Boeing employees.

"These are people who want to work at Boeing," Wallace said of the students. "We're providing them (Boeing) with the kind of workforce they're going to need in the future. Any company to be successful has to have the proper workforce. As their workforce ages É this is one of the ways they can transfer that knowledge to others."

Strickland agreed that partnerships with schools are key to Ohio's success.

"Ohio educates too many people who leave us. There's too much outward migration," he said.

He mentioned the state's economic stimulus package, which is expected to provide \$50-million over five years for internship programs and cooperative education programs.

Strickland said if the state could connect students with employers through

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internships, the students might be more likely to remain in Ohio when they graduate from college.

Heath officials hope some of that state funding in the economic stimulus package will come to Heath to help with these programs and others.

"We hope to see some of those funds come our way," said Rick Platt, director of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority.

Boeing is Heath's largest employer, with 1,018 employees.

Heath Mayor Richard Waugh said the city earns tax revenues from those employees and said Heath benefits from Boeing in other ways. He mentioned 35 engineering recently posted positions, which could bring in highly skilled workers from other states.

"It has nothing but a positive effect," Waugh said.

The VMC is expected to be completed in one month. The more than \$1-million project was aided by \$240,000 in state funding and \$260,000 from the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, Platt said.

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