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New program making Tech Valley world friendly

By Bethany Bump

CAPITAL REGION – International newcomers to the region can now get the lowdown on Capital Region customs, culture, tradition, government, health care and many other lifestyle questions all in one place.

Tech Valley Connect launched its Cultural Transition Program this week, furthering the regional consortium's goal of attracting and retaining talented business people from across the globe. Employers should take note: The 3-year-old initiative already has strong retention rates and CEO Angela McNerney expects the new program to keep it that way.

"It was important to the partnership team that we raise the level of sophistication in the Capital Region in attracting global businesses key talent from many parts of the world," she said in a news release.

Eight local companies in fields ranging from groceries to transportation have signed on to the Cultural Transition Program: Key Bank, Golub Corp., CDPHP, the Times Union, Tri City Rentals, BBL Hospitality, CDTA and Tangible Development. The program will serve as a hub of information that connects people with resources that make them feel more at home – like a local ethnic market or restaurant.

But its services are primarily educational. After six two-hour sessions, a participant can walk away more knowledgeable about the region than most natives. One session, for example, covers how to open bank accounts, understanding and building credit, home and auto insurance, and even what to keep in your car in case of an emergency. Other sessions look at a region's urgent care locations, police, fire and local health care organizations, political correctness, sensitivity in a post-9/11 world, and jaywalking.

Perhaps the most important component of the program is the language skills it provides, with sessions on using local names and small talk, fine tuning accents, and transitioning from a native language to a second language.

McNerney decided to develop the program after attempting to find relevant resources for the families already using Tech Valley Connect and realizing that there was no comprehensive information all in one place.

"With such vast and deep cultural differences, the lack of resources can have a direct impact on the retention of these original hires or on protecting their families from cultural isolation," she said in the release.