

SCHENECTADY

Tech Valley Connect aids families of new hires

Helping spouse find job in new town a big need

BY BETHANY BUMP

Gazette Reporter

So often, relocating for a new job is not always just about the job.

For a husband out of Texas, it's about his wife and kids who stayed behind until they could sell their old home. For a gay couple out of Vermont, it's about moving to a place where they would be able to adopt a child without extra hassles. For a high-tech recruit, it's about making sure his wife can pursue her career path of dance therapy.

The loose ends are not just superficial hurdles. They have the potential to cost a company a serious amount of money in turnover when a new hire leaves because their

spouse can't find a job or their international background leaves them feeling isolated. That's where Tech Valley Connect comes in.

"We thought we could do some things to address that in a unique way," said President Angela McNerney.

The nonprofit helps relocating professionals and their families feel welcome and engaged when they first arrive in the Capital Region. It helps with spousal employment, family assimilation and cultural transitions. In a sense, it can solve nearly all of a company's recruitment and retention problems.

And McNerney has the numbers to back it up. The cost of turnover — training, moving expenses, and more — can be three times as much as the salary of a new hire. Turnover rate in the fields of technology, engineering, higher education, health care and finance tops 9 percent.

But Tech Valley Connect has retained all 76 families it has assisted

in its three years of operation, from clients with regional institutions like SEMATECH, Wadsworth Center, SUNY Albany, and others.

At a networking event with about a dozen Schenectady County officials Thursday, McNerney touted the program's benefits and urged community leaders to spread the word.

Many in Schenectady County aren't even aware of the program's existence, said MVP Health Care President and CEO David Olfker.

"I think the Schenectady involvement is not where we'd like it," he said. "And I view this as one of those arrows in the quiver that we are using."

Tech Valley Connect consists of a consortium of employers throughout the Capital Region who have agreed to offer informational interviews to a traveling spouse. Many big name employers are members, including GE Healthcare, GE Global Research and Development, and GlobalFoundries.

"It is not a job interview," stressed McNerney. "It's not. Our job is to professionally and personally network these people so that they're integrated into the community."

When Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute was recruiting a man who wouldn't accept an offer until his wife was sure she had career options in the region, RPI referred the couple straight to Tech Valley Connect.

The woman was a dance therapist.

"It was challenging at best," laughed McNerney.

The program set her up with nearly 10 information interviews to discuss her prospects with the people in her field. So she went to Four Winds and different hospitals in the region, a dance studio and yoga studios — "places that were looking to do different things," said McNerney. "We just got really creative, brainstormed about this and we had her meeting so many dif-

ferent people her head was spinning."

They arrived on a Monday and by Thursday her spouse had accepted the job with RPI.

As the Capital Region continues to experience a growing tech sector — bolstered by GlobalFoundries in Malta and General Electric's footprint in Schenectady County, among others — it needs to be prepared to welcome international employees to the region.

"Twenty percent of our clients were internationals and that's growing and that's going to keep growing," said McNerney. "We level of sophistication of the region. If we're going to be attracting global markets here, we really have to have services that meet their needs."

The cultural transition is a big part of that, and it's so basic employees don't often think about it. Like the spouse who drives without a license because it wasn't a big

deal where they were from. Or the woman who wouldn't invite kids over to the house because she was too afraid Americans all sue each other.

Tech Valley Connect already helps with these basics, but is launching a Cultural Transition Program in September that includes language courses.

When a family uses the program, a coordinator also compiles a portfolio with resources they might request: doctors, dentists, mechanics, plumbers, recreational options, and more.

"It's about making people know that where they just landed, they're going to be OK," said McNerney. "It's not the black hole of voicemail, it's not a basket full of brochures and saying have at it. It is real life, vetted qualified resources that we connect them to."

Reach Gazette reporter

Bethany Bump at 395-3107 or bbump@dailygazette.net.