

newsworthy trends

Finding America's Next High-Tech Mecca



(NAPSA)—It may surprise some people to learn which high-tech region has a higher per capita income—and lower cost of living—than California's Silicon Valley or Boston's famed Route 128. It's Automation Alley, located in affluent Oakland County, Michigan, on the outskirts of Detroit. In fact, the area has been called a "relatively unheralded haven of high-tech resources" and employment opportunities.

Automation Alley was conceived in 1998 and derives its name from the area's automotive heritage and proximity to the I-75 and I-696 thoroughfares. The Alley started with a core of just 34 companies, but today is home to more than 450-member businesses and 167,000 high-tech workers (which ranks it third in America for the greatest number of high-tech employees in a county or area).

The Alley lets member companies network and compare successful business models, while in return, companies have touted their affiliation with the high-tech consortium, advancing the brand, and helping the region shed what some have called a "Rust Belt" image.

"In the last few years, we have had some pretty impressive technology companies re-locate here, from what I would consider 'name' regions," says Ken Rogers, deputy executive for Oakland County and executive director for Automation Alley. "They're discovering that this area is surprisingly vibrant when it comes to finding high-tech talent and business opportunities."

Rogers says high-tech workers from across the country have noticed as well. The Automation Alley Web site (www.automationalley.com), which features a

resume posting page, has more than 3,284 resumes presently registered.

There is evidence that the Alley's influence is also spreading beyond the borders of Oakland County. In 2001, an association of interactive marketing professionals called *glima* came to the area. Its goal was to promote the resources of small technology companies in southeastern Michigan. Today, *glima* start-up chapters have popped up throughout the state and parts of Ontario.

Besides having access to networking functions and member-driven seminars, Automation Alley members have the opportunity to participate in overseas trade missions.

In 2001, the area hosted a trade mission to Frankfurt, Germany to encourage overseas investment in member companies. Collectively, 14 companies brought back \$1.5 million in new contracts. In spring 2002, Automation Alley embarked on a similar trade mission to three cities in China with the hopes of cultivating new business and enhancing the region's brand.

The Alley consortium also works in the area of e-waste recycling and disposal. Southeastern Michigan produces approximately one billion pounds of electronic waste a year, about three times the average for other high-tech epicenters. Many of these products contain lead, mercury and cadmium, which are harmful if introduced into the groundwater.

With this in mind, the Alley is exploring the prospects of building a regional recycling and disposal center where electronic trash can be brought in, evaluated, then recycled or disposed of in an environmentally-safe fashion.