

## Appalachian Ohio



The Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio, a 29-county area with more square miles than Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Jersey combined, has been plagued by job losses for the past five years. With a population of more than 1.4 million, the Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio seeks to make greater strides in workforce and economic development as a Second Generation WIRED region.

To address these challenges, Information Technology Alliance of Appalachian Ohio, Inc (ITAAO) hopes to improve the region's stature in one of America's fastest growing and most explosive business sectors – the computer gaming, serious gaming and simulation industry – creating a Region of Excellence in Interactive Digital Technology (IDT). Recently, the gaming industry nationally surpassed the entertainment industry in gross annual sales. The console gaming industry is predicted to grow to \$26 billion by 2010.

To help create favorable conditions for this industry in the region, key partners including regional colleges and universities have begun offering programs focusing on IDT. The Region of Excellence will use this educational foundation to create new businesses and use Ohio's strong infrastructure in fiber optics to attract new gaming and other companies to the region. The region will also feature new cyber parks and university-run technology laboratories, exposing students to interactive digital technology and promoting the development of new companies in the region. A developed infrastructure will also lead to retention of graduates for the IDT programs and encourage entrepreneurship in the region. The collaborative effort will be managed by ITAAO, Inc.

ITAAO's current efforts include:

- Providing internships through the Ohio Department of Development Third Frontier Internship Program;
- Linking students to local jobs through the ITAAO Jobs website;
- Fostering relationships between these student and local companies, entrepreneurs and employment opportunities through job fairs;
- Developing and distributing publications and materials that introduce students to the IDT community in the region.



Supportive organizations such as the Ohio University Voinovich Center for Leadership and Public Affairs and its Business Development Group, Ohio Supercomputer Center, the Third Frontier Network and the Ralph Regula School of Computational Modeling will create user friendly on-line, interactive tools, in an effort to stimulate area interest and IDT growth. Other organizations that partner with ITAAO include local chambers of commerce, local development districts, the Ohio Governor's Regional Economic Representative and county economic development officials.

Although the Region of Excellence is still in its formative stages, the WIRED partnership is participating in a series of meetings throughout the region to build awareness of and support for their activities. In October 2006, the Region of Excellence was a major contributor to the Shawnee 4.0 Conference on Digital Technology, which attracted thousands of attendees over two days. Following the conference, the regional team, led by ITAAO, is working to build on the momentum from the conference and move forward with a concerted effort to bring partners together and begin to work to develop the Region of Excellence.