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# Region awarded \$550,000 Walmart grant

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By GRACE WYLER

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youngstown

The Oh-Penn Interstate Region, a regional work-force and economic-development group, has received a \$550,000 grant from the Walmart Foundation, Oh-Penn representatives announced Wednesday at a press conference here.

The Oh-Penn Interstate Region — which services Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties in Ohio and Mercer and Lawrence counties in Pennsylvania — aims to coordinate employment and work-force development activities in the region. The organization was formed in April 2009.

The group is led by a Competitiveness Council, made up of representatives from the Mahoning and Columbiana Training Association, Trumbull County One Stop and the West Center Job Partnership in Pennsylvania.

The council, which first met in February, was invited by the Walmart Foundation to apply for its America Works grant.

The foundation donated \$3.4 million in grants to seven regional work-force development programs. The Oh-Penn Interstate Region grant was the largest sum awarded.

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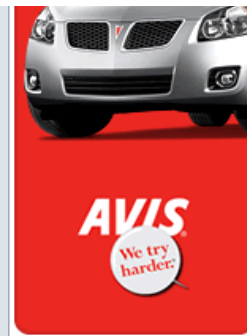
Sam Giannetti is the executive director of work-force development for West Central Job Partnership.

The grant funds will be used to implement the council's strategic plan for integrating work-force and economic-development activities in the region, said Bert Cene, director of the MCTA.

Specifically, the organization will use the money to expand WorkKeys, a skills-assessment system used in Mercer and Lawrence counties that tests workplace skills and identifies areas where training is needed. The grant money will help expand this program into Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties, Cene said.

The organization will also work to expand the Business Resource Network from Northeast Ohio into Lawrence and Mercer counties. The network advises local businesses on how to best expand and retain their work force.

At Wednesday's conference, Lawrence County commissioner Ken Ammann thanked the organization members for their efforts and urged them to use the grant funds wisely.



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