

Consortium vies for state funds for Innovation Hub

Glass project is 1st priority

By **MIKE BRICE**
BLADE POLITICS WRITER

Toledo-area leaders vying for state and federal funding met Thursday morning with Lt. Gov. Jon Husted to make their pitch for why Toledo should receive a share of \$125 million to establish an Innovation Hub.

Meeting at the world headquarters of O-I Glass Inc. in Perrysburg, about three dozen

business leaders, elected officials, and representatives from multiple educational institutions shared why northwest Ohio should receive state funding.

"Northwest Ohio is a manufacturing powerhouse," Regional Growth Partnership Chairman Jim Hoffman said. "A powerhouse in glass, in solar, advanced manufacturing, especially in automobiles. We



THE BLADE/REBECCA BENSON

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, left, meets with Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz during a meeting at O-I Glass in Perrysburg where Toledo-area leaders pitched for a share of \$30 million to \$50 million for multiple projects.

have world-class companies who are competing for their lives and their futures."

"An investment into collaboration around innovation will ensure advanced technology, more jobs, and sustainability

for these companies going forward," Mr. Hoffman said.

The initiative aims to add Innovation Hubs in cities outside of Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, each receiving \$100 million in state funding.

Toledo aims to win \$30 million to \$50 million from the state. Other cities seen as strong contenders for the state money are Dayton, Akron, and Cincinnati.

See **GLASS**, Page B7

Glass

Continued from Page B6

and Youngstown.

Many in attendance are members of the Northwest Ohio Innovation Consortium, a nonprofit that will apply for both federal and state funding.

Roger Smith, the regional innovation officer for the steering group, who is on loan from global bottle-maker O-I Glass, said the funding will accelerate the progress, but the real accomplishment has been bringing together industry leaders and educators to help with the organization's first project.

"The very first project that we are going to tackle with this consortium is the decarbonization and efficiency of the solar industry, and that's done with a very tight linkage to glass," Mr. Smith said. "Glass makes up a substantial cost component and carbon component of the solar panel, and that will be our first prioritization."

The ability to manufacture price-competitive solar panels with less carbon will provide a marketplace advantage as customers look to increase their



THE BLADE/REBECCA BENSON

Owens Community College President Dr. Dione Somerville, center, meets Lt. Gov. Jon Husted at the roundtable to discuss the allotment of state funding.

purchases of sustainable products, said Lou Trippel, First Solar's director of project management.

Decarbonization will also come from making the glass lighter, reducing the carbon footprint associated with the transportation of glass, Mr. Smith said.

"The supply chain is a cascading effect," Mr. Smith said.

The consortium plans to apply for federal funding next week and expects to learn the application details from the

state in September, with the application deadline coming a few months later, Mr. Smith said.

Lieutenant Governor Husted said those in attendance Thursday presented promising ideas.

"I am looking for a great proposal from the Toledo area with business leading it and education at the table and government at the table, but we want it to be industry-led," Mr. Husted said. "Helping to create the sustainable supply chain

around electricity is an area of focus that Toledo has the potential to be a world leader in."

One challenge facing northwest Ohio and the entire Midwest is the shrinking working-age population, Mr. Husted said.

"Our challenge will be the talent production at all levels to be able to sustain growth," he said.

The trades in the area are retiring at a much faster pace than they are being replaced, Mr. Smith said.

"Our goal is to create a pipeline of trainers so we can train the next generation of trades that make the area strong," he said.

Using an analogy that resonated with many in the room, Mr. Husted said, "We don't want to be a BlackBerry. We want to be an iPhone. We want to be the best."

"What you are talking about here with the Innovation Hub can serve as a center of excellence and a catalyst to do more things and bring more things to the game because you are a class act."

Contact Mike Brice at: mbrice@theblade.com, or on Twitter @MikeBrice.