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FEATURED

Groups announce tech push for 2017

Coalition says it will be able to pool complimentary resources

BY ETHAN FORMAN STAFF WRITER Feb 15, 2017



KEN YUSZKUS / Photo. North Shore Workforce Investment Board executive director, Mary Sarris, speaks at the Technology Coalition of the North Shore 2017. 2/15/17

Ken Yuzskus



PEABODY — A push to promote the North Shore's tech sector is now underway.

Called the Technology Coalition of the North Shore 2017, the initiative focuses on helping companies recruit and hire new talent, which is in high demand. The coalition also wants to expand resources available to companies and support tech jobs in the region.

"As a coalition, we will provide complimentary resources for startup and growing companies, as well as companies where success depends on a technology literate workforce," said Mary Sarris, executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board, during a breakfast meeting Wednesday announcing the group.

"Our focus will be on addressing the talent pipeline," she said, "making sure there are qualified and educated employees to take the positions on the North Shore, regional branding, business recruitment, and being a voice for technology here on the North Shore."

Fittingly, business leaders marked the launch with a cellphone selfie.

The kickoff event, attended by more than 120 business people and officials, took place at the Centennial Drive headquarters of medical and aviation security imaging company Analogic Corp.

With more than 700 employees in Peabody, Analogic is a major tech employer on the North Shore. Fred Parks, the company's new president and CEO, gave the keynote address Wednesday.

"I can't guide you on how to prepare for the North Shore activity, you have many more experts in this room than myself," Parks said, "but I can give you some encouragement."

A tech partnership

The coalition is a partnership among North Shore InnoVentures, a biotech and cleantech incubator; the North Shore Workforce Investment Board, which oversees federally-funded employment services in the region; the Enterprise Center at Salem State University; the North Shore Alliance for Economic Development and the North Shore Technology Council.

"We know that by working together, our successes are going to be greater than they would be individually," said Laura Swanson, executive director of the Enterprise Center and interim executive director of the economic development alliance.

The coalition will be a yearlong endeavor to bring together what has been separate but similar efforts to promote technology in the region. At the end of the year, technology council President Linda Saris said the group will evaluate its work and plan ahead for 2018.

Next year, the coalition could include organizations such as the North Shore Chamber of Commerce, the Salem Partnership and InnoNorth, a Salem-based organization promoting innovation north of Boston.

Sarris said her organization, WIB, aims to build a balance between the supply and demand side of the labor market.

That can be complicated, nowadays, given low unemployment, and a state unemployment rate of 2.8 percent in December. This low rate makes it hard for technology companies to find skilled workers.

"Our interest in technology, the WIB's interests, is really real, it is nerve-rackingly real right now," Sarris said. The WIB and the Enterprise Center have a survey out on the future of work, and results so far show businesses want workers with an "ability and willingness to learn" and "technology fluency."

Some attendees liked the idea of the various business groups coming together.

"I think it's great to get these multiple organizations together like this," said Hans Riemer, president of MarketVantage of Groton, which supports technology companies in their online marketing efforts. "I think individually, there's not as much that can be accomplished as getting a group like this together, so I'm pretty excited about this."

"I think it's a good idea," said Jason Vining, president of Salem Metal Fabricators Inc. of Middleton, and a member of the North Shore Technology Council. "It's a collaborative of businesses and ideas working together."

"It's very exciting to see the communities in the North Shore collaborating and we look forward to working together to support entrepreneurs and innovators in every corner of the Commonwealth," said Helena Fruscio Altzman, the state Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development's deputy assistant secretary of innovation, entrepreneurship and technology, in an email.

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