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Lake County Access to opportunity

Lake County officials recently collaborated with Lincoln Electric's Mentor facility and [Component Repair Technologies](#) to develop an approach to connect people from low-income areas to opportunities at the companies.

“What we came up with, to help in the overwhelming initiative to impact our workforce in Lake County, was a combination of using public transit to get workers from outside of the county to jobs inside the county, and to also to provide transportation for students who wish to participate in CRT’s Student Opportunities in Aviation Repair program over the summer,” said Joel DiMare, Lake County's director of administrative services.

The S.O.A.R. program provides training to students for jobs in the aerospace industry, then offers full-time employment to those who successfully complete the program and graduate from high school.

CRT Human Resources Manager John Gallagher noted the collaboration led to a \$75,000 transportation grant from the [Paradox Prize](#) project, a public call established to improve the mobility of Northeast Ohio’s workforce, generating sustainable solutions that aim to eliminate the “...no car, no job, no job, no car” paradox in Northeast Ohio.

“The program has already proven to be an excellent bridge for high school students to begin a career in aviation, but we have also seen, in several cases, the barrier that transportation can pose to a student’s success,” Gallagher said.

Kelly Kehn, director of Human Resources at [Lincoln Electric](#) , said attracting and retaining prospective employees from East Cleveland is a priority for the company.

“And providing an efficient and cost effective commute to our facilities is important for long-term success,” she added.

To combat the problems relating to transportation accessibility, Lake County commissioners, along with the [Lake County Port Authority](#) and Laketran, have created a pilot project that connects workers with Lake County jobs, funded through the Fund for our Economic Future, a philanthropic organization focused on job readiness and access.

“It’s my priority to encourage our staff and our partner agencies to assist our Lake County

businesses in development of their workforces,” said Commissioner Ron Young.

While [Laketran](#) provides traditional commuter transit service from Cleveland to Eastlake and Mentor, its service hours are limited to first shift.

Laketran will provide direct service between Euclid and Mentor Lincoln Electric locations so current and potential employees can access jobs in Mentor that they may not have previously considered because they have no way to get there, said Laketran CEO Ben Capelle.

“For CRT, we envision an on-demand van service that improves student access to the S.O.A.R. program,” he added. “The participation of the employers is key in the success of this grant. By understanding the unique challenges for these businesses, we are able to create custom solutions to help them recruit and retain qualified employees.

“With this pilot, we hope to learn if demand response transportation is an effective and affordable solution for employees and employers to get people to jobs here in Lake County. If successful, we will have a model of how a public-private transportation solution can support local workforce development.”

Commissioner John Hamercheck said the board is excited to bring together local manufacturing businesses and help them tap a new pool of talent for their workforce.

“This is a perfect example of picking up the torch and finding tangible ways to connect the dots, and Joel and the people he put at the table to head this project are thinking outside of the box in facing these economic challenges,” he added.

Commissioner Jerry Cirino echoed his colleagues in praising the project.

“Our unemployment rate is historically low at 2.8 percent and Lake County employers need to recruit from talent pools in surrounding counties to keep business growing,” he said.

“I applaud our staff, Laketran and the Port Authority for their vision and creativity to produce solutions to get qualified employees to places where they can work. I also want to recognize CRT for continually innovating how they recruit, train and retain their workforce.”