

Braintree expands staff, direction Braintree Center for Business Innovation

By LISA MILLER
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MANSFIELD -- If Bob Cohen is the heart of the Braintree Center for Business Innovation. You might call new director of operations Bob Leach the hands of the local business incubator.

On board at the East Fifth Street facility since April, Leach made the heart reference to Cohen, who now fills the role of director of business assistance. A portion of the \$12.4 million grant from the Third Frontier Project's Entrepreneurial Signature Program to NorTech, a technology-based economic development group in northeast Ohio, allowed Cohen to concentrate on linking entrepreneurs with investors.

Leach is responsible for the building that houses 25 tenants ranging from a trucking company to Web designers to a recording studio. The first and third floors are full, but five offices and another 7,000 square feet of undeveloped space are still available.

A resident of the Columbus area since 1965, Leach's most recent work was with a Grove City manufacturing facility that copied videotapes and compact discs. His background includes time as an electrician, work with a home center retailer and he spent time in the insurance industry. He also owned his own construction and remodeling company and spent time in the Navy, where he was involved in nuclear engineering and Trident submarine service.

Leach offered preparation for Y2K in 2000 as an example of how he has taught himself technology, explaining how he went to the library and took out four books to eventually figure out how to set up an entire computer network.

"I'm a good complement for Bob," Leach said, referring to Cohen's business degrees and his background in international trade.

Cohen sees Leach as a good fit, noting he brings "a lot of technical knowledge ... this helps our program ramp up to an even higher level. We feel like we've more than doubled our capacity to serve entrepreneurs."

Braintree is funded in part by Ohio's Department of Development Technology Division, the City of Mansfield, Richland County and North Central State College and some private businesses.

Leach's goals are to increase jobs and the workforce in Mansfield and the surrounding areas by bringing small companies into the Braintree program and helping them through those tough first years in which most companies fail. He is also involved with the 18-county Northern Ohio IT Alliance, which is designed to encourage growth in the technology field and interaction between people in that industry.

Another aspect of Braintree's role in economic development is assisting the transformation from industrial manufacturing to information technology, with Leach listing the biomedical field and the community's location between Cleveland and Columbus among potential opportunities.

He said he's been impressed with the Pioneer Career and Technology Center, the Kehoe Center and other local education facilities.

"The whole thing is about knowing who to access," Leach said. "We are trying to fill in the blanks."

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