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Regional tech belt proposed

**By STEPHEN ORAVECZ Tribune Chronicle
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Congressman Timothy J. Ryan called Tuesday for a regional summit this summer to create a “tech belt” between Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

The corridor cuts through Warren and Youngstown, and the Mahoning Valley will be a prime location for future development, organizers said.

BioEnterprises of Cleveland and Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse said at a news conference Tuesday in Cleveland that they will help each other’s companies and market the collective strengths of the regions to investors nationwide.

Ryan, D-Niles, said he hopes to expand on the collaboration between the two organizations that provide venture capital and support for biomedical companies.

Baiju Shah, CEO of BioEnterprises, said that together, the Cleveland-Pittsburgh region has bioscience assets that rival more well-known areas such as Minneapolis or the Research Triangle in North Carolina.

That includes more than \$1 billion annually in research funding, more than \$350 million in health care venture capital investments in 2005-06 and more than 700 bioscience companies employing more than 25,000 people.

When that information is presented to national investors, they have been enthusiastic about the opportunities. Shah said they believe they have “discovered a gold mine” and give the region a higher priority than either Cleveland or Pittsburgh could get by itself.

Shah said Syncro Medical, a start up company in Canfield, is an example of the opportunity.

Ryan said the collaboration represents a new way to look at regionalization and is a first step toward creating a viable “tech belt” encompassing the Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown and Pittsburgh metropolitan areas.

“Our region has been linked for over 100 years, first as the Steel Belt, than as the Rust Belt. This is our chance to emerge as the Tech Belt,” Ryan said.

Ryan has said he would use his seat on the powerful House Appropriations committee to use federal funds to make the Mahoning Valley part of a medical triangle with Cleveland and Akron. Now, he is expanding on that proposal.

Using the BioEnterprises and Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse collaboration as a model, Ryan wants to hold a regional summit of leaders from local industries, elected officials and economic development organizations to expand the concept to other high tech industries such as advanced manufacturing.

Shah said there is no reason regional collaboration should not work with other sectors of the economy in addition to bioscience.

“At the very least, it is worth exploring,” he said.

Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse invests in and supports the growth of bioscience companies in Southwestern Pennsylvania and works with Carnegie-Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh and area hospitals.

BioEnterprises has a similar mission in Cleveland with its partners Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals and Summa Health Systems in Akron