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Leaders inform Strickland of local economic woes

By John Nolan

Staff Writer

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DAYTON — City, county and business leaders told Gov. Ted Strickland on Tuesday that they are working together to try to shake the region out of the economic doldrums by building on its strengths in high-tech manufacturing and scientific research.

They also told him of the Miami Valley's problems: losses of thousands of old-line manufacturing jobs, lagging personal incomes and contaminated former industrial sites, known as "brownfields," that public officials are focusing on cleaning up for re-use and new commercial development.

One of those old manufacturing sites, a 35-acre tract near the Fifth Third Field ballpark known as TechTown, could begin a rebirth of sorts in June. That is when officials hope to break ground for its first occupant, the Institute for the Development and Commercialization of Advanced Sensor Technology.

A coalition of universities, the Edison Materials Technology Center and the Air Force Research Laboratory are to support the research institute to encourage commercial development of sensors, electronic units that could eventually be used in health care, aerial mapping and detection of weakening materials in plane parts or other components.

Economists have forecast that the Dayton region's net job growth in 2007 will be one-half of 1 percent. Losses of manufacturing jobs that auto parts maker Delphi Corp. plans to sell or close are projected to nearly offset expected hiring gains in information technology, health care and financial services.

Ohio's unemployment rate was 5 percent in February, down from 5.3 percent in January, according to the state's latest figures released Tuesday. The U.S. jobless rate in February was 4.5 percent, down from 4.6 percent in January.

Strickland, a former Ohio congressman who took over as governor in January, is touring the state to learn more about each region's problems and prospects. He praised the apparent cooperation between Dayton, Montgomery County and surrounding counties in economic development efforts.

Strickland, in response to a reporter's question later, said he is not ready to make any specific commitments of assistance to this region, but his administration will listen to detailed requests. He has warned that Ohio's budget is tight.

"We stand ready to respond to any specific request," the governor said during his appearance at the Dayton Convention Center.

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