

Conference on immigration addresses job opportunities

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By Mark Roth / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

When Sunil Wadhvani looks at the benefits of immigration, he starts with his own company, iGate.

The technology solutions firm, which he started in Pittsburgh, generates \$1.1 billion in annual net revenue and has offices around the world. But it also has played a significant role in job creation and tax support in the U.S., Mr. Wadhvani told a conference on immigration being held today at the University of Pittsburgh law school.

“The companies started by immigrants like ours create jobs and pay taxes,” he told the Global Great Lakes conference, a consortium of Midwestern cities that are trying to boost immigration for economic development. Since his firm began, iGate has paid more than \$3 billion in wages in the United States and an equal amount abroad, the Indian-born co-chairman said, and has paid more than \$500 million in taxes, as well as contributing more than \$1 million to local charities.

In addition, 20 iGate employees have left the company and started their own businesses, he said, which not only boosts direct employment but helps create additional jobs. The technology industry as a whole creates 4.3 spinoff and support jobs for every direct hire, he said.

“The point is that immigrants add value, and regions around the nation are beginning to recognize this, so there is a competition going on to get the best and the brightest.”

Pittsburgh has been behind the curve on competing for immigrants, he and others acknowledged, with foreign-born residents comprising only about 3 percent of the region’s population.

On the other hand, the region’s immigrants tend to be highly qualified.

“I often say the mills never left, they just moved up the hill and they’re called UPMC and Carnegie Mellon and Pitt,” Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto told more than 100 people attending the two-day conference. “They have created the highest-paid, highest-educated pan-Asian community in the United States.”

Mr. Peduto and Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald have both declared their governments as “welcoming” to immigrants, and state Sen. Jim Ferlo, D-Highland Park, announced today he is sponsoring legislation to establish an Office of New Americans within the state’s Department of Community and Economic Development to help

newcomers make the transition to Pennsylvania.

Noting that some cities such as Minneapolis and Denver marketed themselves to immigrant groups decades ago, and then saw their economies improve as those populations arrived, Mr. Wadhvani said of Pittsburgh: "The good news is we are headed now finally in the right direction."