



2017

# Annual Report







# Vision

Northwest Pennsylvania will grow in its business and economic vitality, its residents will become more prosperous and the quality of life will be enhanced in the region's counties and communities.

# Mission

To provide leadership and assistance as well as collaborate and cooperate with our partners in strengthening business and job growth and improving the environment for economic and community development across the Northwest Pennsylvania region.

## Our Organization

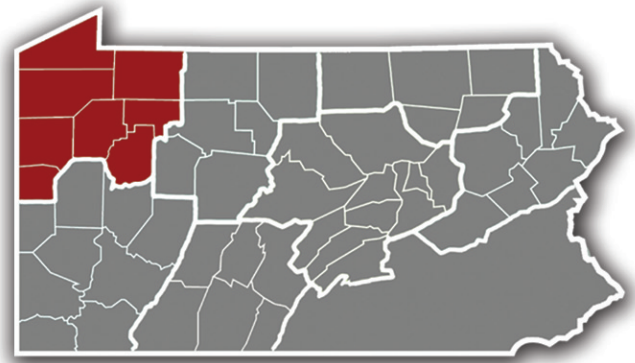
Established in 1967, the Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission (Northwest Commission) is an Oil City-based, public, non-profit regional resource for economic and business development as well as community development and planning.

Funding for the Northwest Commission comes from local, state and federal levels of government. We are pleased to provide quality services at little or no cost to our clients.

## Our Team

The Northwest Commission is comprised of skilled professionals dedicated to sustaining economic vitality and growth in the Northwest Pennsylvania region by fostering local, state and federal partnerships across public and private sector lines.

The Board of Directors represents county governments, private businesses, county planners, tourism and economic development corporations throughout the region.



## Our Services

The Northwest Commission strives to produce private sector job creation and retention through its business and economic development programs such as government contracting, business financing, international marketing assistance, keystone innovation zones and business attraction.

The Northwest Commission also provides community development and planning services such as grants, transportation, community revitalization and technology assistance to municipal governments to help communities stay progressive.

## Our Region

The Northwest Commission is proud to serve eight counties in Northwest Pennsylvania: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango and Warren.



A message from the

# Executive Director

*Welcome to the Northwest Commission's Annual Report. We have spent this year reflecting on the 50 years of investment and assistance to the Northwest Pennsylvania region. The Local Development District System was created by the Appalachian Regional Commission under the President Johnson Administration as part of the War on Poverty. Articles of Incorporation for the Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission were filed on August 23, 1967.*

*The Appalachian Regional Commission and the Economic Development Administration have collectively invested more than \$100 million dollars in the eight counties of the Northwest region which leveraged more than \$200 million more in areas of Education, Infrastructure Development, Business Assistance, Transportation, Community Development and Tourism and Cultural Development. Our Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) is celebrating 35 years of assistance to businesses pursuing government contracts. During this fiscal year, the Loan Program surpassed it's 1,000 closed since inception.*

*It is easy to measure our success by numbers and metrics. Yet no figure is more important nor should be recognized more than the people who make every outcome happen.*

*Every loan, every sale or contract, every project or training is the result of the hard work and commitment made by the Commission staff.*

*I am proud to lead such a talented group and to celebrate 50 years of progress in the Northwest Region and I know we are just getting started.*

*Take care of one another,*



**Jill Foys**  
Executive Director  
Northwest Commission



# International Marketing Program

The Northwest Commission serves as the Regional Export Network (REN) Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Office of International Business Development (OIBD). The REN partner acts as the gateway to Pennsylvania's Authorized Trade Representatives (ATRs) of 15 overseas trade consultants covering 52 countries.

The program offers a wide range of export assistance committed to preparing clients to enter and compete in the global marketplace by providing international opportunities that lead to increased jobs and sales. Services include export readiness assessment, target market research and identification, market entry strategy development, foreign agents/distributor search and trade event/mission assistance.

## IMPACT IN ACTION

Franklin Industries of Franklin, PA was established in 1901 and employs 135 people. Franklin Industries is a Rolling Mill, processing outmoded railroad rails into high-quality highway steel sign posts and agricultural posts. These are shipped daily to customers all over North and South America and as far away as Australia. In 2017, Ben Choffel, VP Sales, invited the Northwest Commission to visit. With a mandate for international market development, Mr. Choffel decided to engage the services of the International Marketing Program to help grow beyond their domestic sales & distribution network.



The Northwest Commission recommended three initial target markets: Mexico, Canada and Australia/New Zealand. Staff began targeted market research, conducted by Pennsylvania's Authorized Trade Representatives (ATRs). Coincidentally, a trade mission to Mexico, organized by the Conference of Great Lakes & St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers in partnership with DCED's Office of International Business Development, was scheduled for April. Mr. Choffel decided to take advantage of the opportunity. He then traveled to Mexico and met with six promising new business prospects, one being the largest of its kind in Mexico. Only half of Mr. Choffel's prospects spoke English and were spread out over three major metropolitan areas.

**78** Jobs Created

**394** Jobs Retained

DCED's ATR in Mexico arranged a driver and translator, making it possible for Ben to accomplish his objectives. One distributor prospect requested a phone meeting before Mr. Choffel even left U.S. soil, allowing him to further their relationship during the subsequent in-person meeting during his trip. Simultaneously, the market research requests for Canada and Australia/New Zealand began. The PA ATR in Canada contacted Franklin Industries, explaining that during their initial research one potential customer already surfaced. This customer also requested a conversation via phone which resulted in an immediate sale.

**\$202,213,592** In Total Export Sales



## Business Financing Program

The Business Financing Program stimulates the creation and expansion of small businesses through the use of fixed low-interest loans, structured to allow companies the ability to borrow based on the number of jobs created and/or retained. The Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is comprised of funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Economic Development Administration (EDA) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). RLF loans can be used for land & building, machinery & equipment and working capital needs. In addition, as a Certified Economic Development Organization (CEDO), the Northwest Commission works with the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to market and administer the loan financing programs available through the Commonwealth.

### IMPACT IN ACTION

PEPRO is a veteran-owned manufacturing company specializing in the manufacture of hardened fixed and mobile Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) and communication sites. Since 1992, the company has designed and manufactured these shelters using a patented Faraday Cage technology that protects sensitive communications equipment against lightning strikes, electromagnetic pulses and interference, passive intermodulation and radio frequency interference. They test each shelter/mobile system in a lab using standards developed between the military and airline industry for certification of airworthiness for aircraft.

# 24

## Loans Closed

# 80

Jobs Created

# 236

Jobs Retained

# \$2,848,387

In Loans Closed

# \$5,626,375

In Leveraged Private Investment

Since 2000, the product line has been expanded beyond enclosures and shelters to mobile radio sites, antenna mounting brackets, antenna standoffs and antenna cable harnesses. The company serves private enterprises both nationally and internationally as well as government agencies.

The company has worked with prime contractors and consulting engineers to implement PEPRO's equipment into major projects and served as a prime contractor for federal agencies.

The company received a \$200,000 loan in January 2017 from the Northwest Commission as part of a \$500,000 project to purchase a new manufacturing facility in the Oil City Industrial Park. The company had 20 full-time employees at the time of application and will be creating another 4 jobs as a result of the expansion.



# **\$105,608,681**

## **in Total Government Sales**

### **Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC)**

The PTAC Team aids clients with understanding federal, state and local government requirements applicable to contracting for services, supplies, manufacturing, construction or other markets. The PTAC advises and assists with prime and subcontract processes, including registrations, marketing, proposal writing and submission of bids. Clients also receive guidance on applying for minority-owned, veteran-owned, woman-owned and HUBZone (Historically Underutilized Business Zone) certifications. Trainings are regularly provided, teaching clients how to compete successfully in the local, state and federal government workplace. In addition, seminars conducted throughout the year give area businesses the opportunity to meet with a variety of government agencies as well as prime contractors.

### **IMPACT IN ACTION**

Erie Cotton Products Inc. of Erie, PA, has been a client of the Northwest Commission PTAC since 2014. With assistance from the PTAC, Erie Cotton become an Approved Source by successfully completing a comprehensive DLA Source Approval Request (SARS) package, an assembly of information required of a prospective new supplier wanting to sell their product to DLA. The company was awarded a contract as a result.

Customer Relations Manager of Erie Cotton Products, Inc., Stephanie Renwick, commented on the assistance she received from the PTAC: "With the help of the PTAC, we were able to complete a SARS package and successfully become the only approved source for the DLA's rag business."

Ms. Renwick stated, "Without the PTAC we would have never been able to do this on our own. Now that we are the only approved source, this gives us the advantage to win every rag bid the DLA has."

The company reported that they retained 29 jobs and generated one new job.

# **111**

**Jobs Created**

# **260**

**Jobs Retained**



## Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (PREP)

The Northwest Pennsylvania Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (NW PREP) is one of ten economic development regions designated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As the regional coordinator, the Northwest Commission brings together local, county and regional economic and workforce developers, government offices and statewide organizations to work together on specific projects and proactively seek out new resources and opportunities to build a stronger and more prosperous Northwest region.

### IMPACT IN ACTION

In January 2017, the Northwest Commission was awarded a POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) grant for a Regional Broadband Study. POWER is an initiative to help communities and regions that have been affected by job losses in the coal industry.

The "Northwest PA Needs Assessment and Plan to Enhancing Access to and Use of Broadband Service" is an in-depth broadband assessment and analysis that will provide the region with data into the barriers preventing the full participation in the digital economy by members of the region.



On June 5, 2017, the Northwest PA Regional Broadband Committee, comprised of representatives from the eight counties of Northwest Pennsylvania, kicked off the first-ever "Connected Community Engagement Project" in Pennsylvania. The committee serves as the backbone of the assessment, assisting in the distribution of residential and business broadband surveys and serving as marketing liaisons for Connected Nation's broadband assessment.

"We have built and sustained relationships with the Northwest Commission that have evolved into successful economic development partnerships. Through the leadership of the Northwest Commission staff and in partnership with the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), we have developed innovative strategies that are strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem, improving the regional economy and providing our youth access to exciting educational and career opportunities. The City of Hermitage and the eCenter@LindenPointe are very proud to be a part of unique local-regional-state-federal collaborative efforts that are making a difference in the future of our region."

- Gary M. Gulla  
Assistant City Manager, City of Hermitage



## Transportation

The Northwest Commission serves as the Northwest Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Planning Partner for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT). In partnership with the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), comprised of local leaders from the five-county region of Clarion, Crawford, Forest, Venango and Warren, projects are prioritized to meet the current and future needs of the region.

### IMPACT IN ACTION

Hunter Station Bridge is a major river crossing replacement project in the Northwest RPO region for US 62 over the Allegheny River in Tionesta Township in Forest County. Over 20 years in the making, this project is now under construction at a cost of \$24 million. The site has the largest known reproducing population of two federally listed endangered mussel species. Careful consideration was made to protect the species during construction.

This past year the Transportation Program has also completed the Freight Facility Inventory and Corridor Study, the Rideshare Feasibility Study and updated the Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan. Work on the development of the 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Program has also begun.



# Over \$78 Million

Invested Last Year in Roads & Bridges

# 21

Trainings Held

# 270

Attendees

### Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP)

The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) provides local municipalities with technical training, technical assistance and other services. Classes address topics such as roadway maintenance, safety, drainage and signage and are offered to municipalities in the counties of: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Mercer, Venango and Warren.

LTAP classes are requested and scheduled throughout the year. In addition, if a municipality has a specific issue and would like one of LTAP's professionals to assist them, a technical assist can be done via telephone or an LTAP professional can offer on-site assistance. LTAP services are provided at no charge to the municipalities.



## Greenways

The Northwest Commission's Greenways Block Grant Program facilitates the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Northwest Pennsylvania Greenways Plan as well as the statewide and regional priorities of the program partners, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

An implementation grant of this nature continues to be successful for the completion of smaller projects not eligible or unable to compete for alternative funding methods.

### IMPACT IN ACTION

A 2016 grant to the Allegheny Valley Land Trust, which acquired the corridor (miles 4 - 43) in June 2010, is currently funding improvement of five of the remaining nine miles by the Redbank Valley Trails Association. The improved corridor will control erosion and provide a safe transportation and exercise route, access to natural areas and historic sites and recreation opportunities for students, residents and an ever growing number of visitors. Properties are being improved, new businesses are being established, existing businesses are growing and economic opportunities now exist where few existed due to lack of industry.

# 81

**Projects Funded**

# 210

**Applications  
Received**

# 68

**Participants  
Since Inception**

"Greenways Block Grants have been instrumental in bringing the 51-mile trail corridor through southern and central Clarion County to reality as the now highly acclaimed Redbank Valley Trails, PA's first Trail of the Year in 2014. Grants in in the past to New Bethlehem Borough provided funding for a Trail Town Study, Trail Feasibility Study and trail improvement in New Bethlehem as its center."

- Sandy Mateer, President

New Bethlehem Borough Council, Redbank Vally Trails Association



# 2016 - 2017 Board of Directors



Commissioner Albert "Chip" Abramovic - Venango County  
Jim Becker - Titusville Economic Development Corporation\*  
Commissioner Scott Boyd - Mercer County\*  
Councilman Jay Breneman - Erie County  
Commissioner Steve Craig - Lawrence County\*  
County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper - Erie County  
(Kristin Bowers, Alternate)\*  
Jim Decker - Warren County Chamber of Business & Industry  
Dan Gracenin - Mercer County Regional Planning Commission\*  
Alana Mastrian-Handman - Erie County  
Commissioner Basil Huffman - Forest County  
Commissioner Ben Kafferlin - Warren County\*  
Debb Kapp - Action Auto Service, Inc.\*  
Elton Kline - Masonry Contracting Consultant  
Tom McKinley - McKinley Technical Services  
Lizette Olsen - AWARE, Inc.\*  
John Stroup - Clarion Hospital Foundation\*  
Commissioner Ted Tharan - Clarion County\*  
Commissioner Francis Weiderspahn - Crawford County\*  
Kim Zippie - Commodore Perry School District\*

\*Pictured

The Northwest Commission's Board of Directors is comprised of public and private citizens representing eight counties in Northwest Pennsylvania.

The board contains an Executive Committee, who oversees administrative duties, responsibilities and goals of the entire board.

## **Board Officers**

Commissioner Francis Weiderspahn, Chair  
Commissioner Basil Huffman, Vice Chair  
Debb Kapp, Secretary  
Lizette Olsen, Treasurer



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