



Contributed photo

Left to right are state Rep. Tom Raga, Mike Geygan, chair of the Area Progress Council College Task Force and Dr. Vince Roessner, superintendent of the Warren County Career Center. These three have been working to create a community college for Warren County, which looks to become reality with recently passed legislation in Columbus.

## County-based college on the horizon

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With large housing developments and many new residents in Springboro and surrounding areas alone, Warren County officials have recently decided to address the need for local higher education for Warren County residents.

Although Warren County is one of the most rapidly growing counties in the state of Ohio, it does not have a college or university of any kind within county borders.

That will soon change, though, as the Ohio State Legislature has passed its budget, which included language outlining a Warren County community college, formalizing the idea.

A pilot program for a new Warren County community college will be started within a year as classes should be held at the Warren County Career Center (WCCC) and other area high schools — a sort of “college without walls,” which means classes could be held throughout the county in the buildings

that would rent out the space.

If the two-year pilot program is a success, a self-sustaining, accredited community college could be formed, most likely built on a to-be-determined site.

This is welcome news to county officials who realize that the lack of local higher education may be a hindrance to the local labor force and a detriment to the local economy.

“The pilot plan lets Warren County develop the infrastructure for a partnership with educational institutions and will allow us to bring higher education to Warren County right away,” said Rep. Tom Raga, who placed the matter into the state budget.

### Statistics and planning

Warren County ranked near the bottom in Ohio in the age group of 18-39 for people with absolutely no college education. According to statistics tabulated in 1999, out of a population of 48,241 for the mentioned age group, 4,204 were enrolled at a college or university.

Similarly, Ohio ranked 39th among the 50

states for people having a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Not having a county college nearby may contribute to the lack of higher education for those residents, officials say, which led to talks for forming a local college.

So studying numbers such as these, Dr. Vince Roessner, superintendent of the Warren County Career Center, and John Lazares, superintendent for Warren County, decided to ask the Area Progress Council for a study.

A committee formed in Jan. 2002, which included all school district superintendents, area business people and others as the Warren County Commissioners funded a study conducted May 2002.

Strategic Planning’s Diane Lawrence performed the study and determined there was “a perceived need for some form of higher education.”

Data was compiled, in part, by telephone surveys of Warren County residents. Of those polled, 61 percent said young people

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would leave Warren County to begin their careers. More than 50 percent said local students leave the county to attend college. And 59 percent said there was a great need or some need for a local community college.

After this survey, a forum for area colleges was held as representatives present were from Miami University, University of Cincinnati, Wright State University, Sinclair Community College, Cincinnati State and others.

One of the conclusions drawn from this forum was the relative inexpensive way to gain a two-year degree from a community college in comparison to the cost of two years at one of the larger universities.

For example, a student would pay double the amount of money to attend a four-year institution for two years than obtaining a two year degree at a community college, according to Peg Allen, public information specialist for the WCCC.

## Action taken

It was about this time that state Rep. Tom Raga "just stepped in and introduced legislation into the budget bill" putting the plan on a "Japanese bullet train."

There is no funding initially because there really doesn't need to be.

So, Sinclair, for instance, pays the WCCC to rent a room at the career center building and the students enrolled in that class pay Sinclair.

This really isn't new to the WCCC as it has rented out classroom space to colleges for the last 15 years. What is new is formalizing it and mapping out a change from contracting-services agreements into an accredited degree-granting institution.

A pilot program could be launched this fall or January 2004, for a two-year run and then transition to a fully-operational college with a staff, president, collegiate-level library, etc.

A governing board will have to be formed 90 days from July 1, with the

County Commissioners choosing six volunteers and Gov. Bob Taft choosing three. This committee, not yet named, will have two years to form the business plan.

So after the language passed the state's House and Senate, the WCCC's board of education passed a resolution at their June 26 meeting calling to go forth in planning. The vote was 4-2 with the 'no' votes voicing concern about too rapid a pace without a firm business plan in place.

Also sitting in at the meeting were local superintendents who attended. All superintendents belonging to the WCCC were present — Springboro, Little Miami, Waynesville, Franklin, Kings and Lebanon.

While most superintendents focus mainly on Kindergarten through 12th grade, higher education can help out at that level since "it's all tied together."

"Adult workforce training leads to improvements at K through 12 be-

cause more educated adults lead to better businesses with a better tax base to provide for youth education," Allen said.

So with the resolution's passage, a two-year pilot program will be initiated with the WCCC board acting as fiscal agent to oversee bringing in various college instructors to teach classes.

So for example (and these are just hypothetical scenarios as no contracts have been drawn), Sinclair could send an auto mechanics instructor and Wright State could send a drama instructor to teach students.

There will be a narrow focus the first two years to concentrate on three in-demand professions: information technology, teaching and healthcare, such as nursing, which is ideal for the WCCC which already has a nursing lab for its high school students.

"It will provide opportunities to businesses by allowing them to im-

prove their employees," said Raga. "We will have a much more highly educated workforce in Warren County which is preparing Warren County to be a success in the future."

So with much empty classroom space at night, the WCCC and other county high schools would be available for evening classes with instructors being brought in from local universities and colleges.

And now one of next steps is contacting local colleges and universities to see if they want to enter into agreements for a partnership.

If the pilot program is a success and the green light is given, a Warren County community college should be formed.

"I think it's right for Warren County," said Roessner. "It fits with our mission to serve Warren County, and I think it'll be viewed as one of the best things to happen to Warren County."