

The Latest in Cyberlaw

TECHBUFFALO

This month we will take a look at TechBuffalo, Inc., a nonprofit startup that is gearing up to play an important role in the field of technology in Western New York.

TechBuffalo was formed in October 2017 but became operational in February 2020, when it received a major funding commitment from Empire State Development. After the funding was in place, and shortly before the pandemic lockdown began, the Board hired James Partsch, Jr. as Executive Director. James, age 36, previously held leadership positions at New Era Cap, M&T Bank, and GEICO.

James hit the ground running and has spent the last 15 months hiring staff, establishing the organizational structure, obtaining IRS approval as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, lining up additional funding, and building relationships with many agencies, colleges, nonprofits and businesses.

The mission of TechBuffalo is to become the technology hub of the Greater Buffalo area. As James describes it, TechBuffalo seeks to “drive the growth of an inclusive and accessible technology ecosystem in WNY.” The organization will carry out its mission by “cultivating our area’s ability to attract, retain and foster technology talent.”

I asked James to define “technology,” and he started by saying what it is not. It is not a system or output. Rather, technology means innovation, or how to do things better and differently to achieve an outcome. Thus, “technology jobs” includes a wide range of occupations, such as jobs in cyber security, web and application development, and data analytics and engineering.

TechBuffalo will play a key role in coordinating the efforts of educational institutions, nonprofits, businesses and government

agencies to provide training for new and existing technology workers, publicize job opportunities, attract talent from within and outside the region, and mentor and support workers who hold technology internships and jobs.

Major funding partners include not only Empire State Development but also the Wilson Foundation and the WNY Impact Investment Fund. Industry partners include M&T Bank and PCI (a Buffalo-based IT solutions provider). Buffalo Erie Workforce is an important governmental partner, and educational partners include SUNY Erie, NCCC, Trocaire, D’youville, University at Buffalo, and Buffalo State, among others. TechBuffalo also works with organizations such as 43North, Techstars, Forge Buffalo and Invest BuffaloNiagara.

The organization is ramping up its TechBuffalo.org website and information database, with the goal of serving as a comprehensive resource for the Greater Buffalo technology community. In addition, TechBuffalo has been actively involved with others in the launch of WNY Tech Skills Initiative, a “free reskilling/ upskilling initiative to help Western New Yorkers develop marketable tech and digital skills.” The program features a “series of virtual courses that allow you to discover tech career options and walk away with new skills in coding, data, marketing, and user experience design in the comfort of your own home. Workshops and classes will be a mix of self-led & instructor-led material and are 100% virtual.”

Another major initiative is the Tech Academy Community



Anne F. Downey

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brianpbrady.com

bpbradyarchitect@gmail.com

716.392.7271



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Brian P. Brady, AIA, is an architect with 45 years experience. For over a decade, he has been a Member of the American Arbitration Association’s Panel of Neutrals for Construction Disputes

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Cohorts program. TechBuffalo will work alongside of a training provider that will hold technology classes at M&T Bank's new training center in Seneca One Tower. The Academy will reskill up to 30 community students at a time in a "bootcamp-style" environment focused on skill areas like software development, data science, and cyber security. The intensive courses will be 12 to 14 weeks in length, with a time commitment of 40 to 60 hours per week. Programs will feature live instruction and hands-on exercises to develop students' technical skills, as well as soft skills related to landing and keeping a job. By the end of the course, Academy graduates - assisted by a Career Coach - will be prepared to take on entry-level roles in a technology field.

During their journey at the Academy, students will have access to "wrap-around" support services that address challenges to their success and ensure they can achieve their career goals. Services may include addressing financial insufficiency, child care, transportation, health and mental health challenges, legal concerns, financial counseling, and wellness training. Tech Academy aims to build a more diverse technical workforce by creating on-ramps for groups underrepresented in tech employment today, including women, veterans, and persons of color.

Tech Academy will also be used to upskill junior-level tech

professionals for more senior positions. Local employers will be able to send their employees to Tech Academy for training in new technical skills.

I asked James about roadblocks to success, and he said that the biggest need is to change mindsets. The local technology community must become more connected, avoid duplication, and be able to work together more fully. As part of that challenge, it is critical that progress be made with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Despite the pandemic and inevitable setbacks of any nonprofit organization's first year, TechBuffalo is off to a good start, having made huge initial strides towards its role as a technology hub for our region.

If any Erie County Bar members have business and nonprofit clients that are interested in partnering with TechBuffalo, James invites them to reach out to him via the TechBuffalo.com website.

TechBuffalo is a good idea at a time of need for many. I wish the organization success in its mission. 🙏



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