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Fort Wayne Steps Up Efforts To Try And Hold On To Prized Navistar Engineers

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FORT WAYNE, IN (Indiana's NewsCenter) --- Fort Wayne and this region's unemployment office are rolling out a strategy to try and keep skilled Navistar engineers from fleeing town with the company.

It's an effort to specifically help connect about 300 Navistar design engineers with other jobs in this area, to try and lessen the blow from the closing of a local operation that now appears inevitable.

It is not just the fact 1,100 jobs will be lost now that Navistar officials have confirmed plans to phase out the Meyer Road Engineering and Technology Center over the next three years.

It is that many are high skill, high paying positions.

Democrat Mayor Tom Henry showed support on Wednesday for a "WorkOne Northeast" program.

The agency of the state is putting \$100,000 in seed money in a scholarship fund to train Navistar engineers who want to stay around for other jobs available locally.

A web site is also set up to get their resumes to managers of other hiring companies in this area.

President Kathleen Randolph/WorkOne Northeast: " We have many engineering jobs that go unfilled in this region, which is why our employers are telling us that they're sending work to other communities in the United States, because they can't fill those

high skill jobs."

State Rep. Win Moses/(D) Fort Wayne: " We are diversifying, we're increasing our health areas, our defense areas, our education areas, so that we're not a one-company town anymore, so we're making progress, but it's just a very tough time."

Moses knows something about tough times with this same company.

He was mayor in the 1980's, when International Harvester, which preceded Navistar, pulled out of town, idling thousands of workers.

Moses says the employees put out of work then, were assets used to lure GM to town in 1985.

The new Navistar job losses add to mounting totals for this area.

Kathleen Randolph says we've seen 8,000 jobs go away in Northeast Indiana over the past twelve months, part of the reason for the new campaign to try and keep some of these treasured engineers in Fort Wayne.