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U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, was at Rock Valley College in Rockford to announce Wednesday a \$2 million grant from the Small Business Administration to the Illinois Coalition, a small public-private partnership that helps small technology companies commercialize their products. Also pictured are Bill Luhman (clockwise from far left), Steve Nailor, Mark Williams, Mike Mastroianni and Paul Callighan.

Council of 100 lands tech deal

A \$2M federal grant also will help the Illinois Coalition help regional businesses.

By **PAT MILHIZER**
Rockford Register Star

ROCKFORD — A public-private partnership that hopes to help local entrepreneurs commercialize new technology received a \$2 million grant Wednesday from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Illinois Coalition helps businesses in Champaign, Peoria and other communities. Along with news of the grant, the coalition unveiled a new agreement with economic development groups in the Rock River Valley.

"We were going to announce that at our annual meeting (next week), but this is too good an opportunity to pass up," Council of 100 Executive Director Bob Levin said during the grant announcement at Rock Valley College's Woodward Technology Center.

"What it entails is an opportunity for a representative from the Illinois Coalition, on a monthly basis, come here to our community and provide coun-

What it does

The Illinois Coalition was formed in 1989 as a public-private partnership to assist companies and entrepreneurs seeking to commercialize new technology. The Chicago-based group also helps state universities get government funding for capital projects related to science and technology.

For more information on its partnership with the Rockford Area Council of 100, call Executive Director Bob Levin, 815-987-8118.

seling assistance to entrepreneurs to startup businesses."

U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, chairman of the House Committee on Small Business, said the agreement strengthens the region's manufacturing base. The U.S. payroll for high-tech jobs jumped from \$192 billion in 1994 to \$330 billion in 1999, and Illinois ranks sixth for high-tech employment, he said.

The planned Ag-Tech Park in Belvidere will get a boost from the partnership, said Mark Williams, director of Growth Dimensions, Boone County's economic development group. The partnership is a piece in the puzzle for access to capital, he said.

Steven Mitchell, chairman

of the Illinois Coalition, said the Rock River Valley sets a standard in the state for industrial production while having a strong technology base.

What "we try to do is to work with communities like Rockford that have good technology underpinnings and help them pull technology out of the major companies that may want to start new businesses," he said.

We "pull it out of the universities ... work with entrepreneurs on writing business plans, work with them on producing marketing plans."

The new initiative complements ComEd's goal of finding new uses for and users of energy, said company spokesman Paul Callighan, who attended the announcement.

"It makes excellent business sense to be looking at opportunities where we might be better as a business ourselves — or opportunities where we can provide to businesses that are starting up and need it in order to develop these high-tech products."

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