

Regional Information Technology efforts: “Apps & Ale,” “OpenTech Challenge” & IT Roundtable

Through the efforts of the Information Technology (IT) community and the EIGERlab, an IT Roundtable was formed and comprises 12 companies from Illinois and Wisconsin. Currently the members are focused on two areas: 1) creating a vibrant community of IT professionals; and 2) building a pipeline of future IT professionals to ensure the region has the necessary talent to attract new businesses and fill existing open positions. The group recently facilitated two IT-related

events: “Apps & Ale” and the “OpenTech Challenge,” which were well attended and the organizers were pleased with the outcomes.

“Apps and Ale” was a joint effort on the part of the EIGERlab’s IT Roundtable, City of Rockford, Illinois Science and Technology Coalition, Smart Chicago Collaborative and Northern Illinois Coders. The goal was to create an open dialogue on civic innovation, open data and the Illinois OpenTech Hackathon. “EIGERlab and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council recognize the great assets Rockford has in the high-tech community,” said Dan Cataldi, executive director of EIGERlab. “We believe the IT Roundtable will create the opportunity to work together with industry experts to attract high-tech talent and business to Rockford.”

Patrick Zuroske with the City of Rockford and judge at the “OpenTech Challenge” event stated, “I was pleased with the level of creative energy assembled during the event. I expected a certain level of energy, but what I saw actually exceeded my expectations.” During the first event of its kind in the region, there were several potentially interesting apps created that may solve some of the region’s challenges, including: an app that advised of construction sites; one that consolidates local-event calendars; and an app where you could post photos of broken signs, streetlights, etc. to alert the City.

The EIGERlab and IT Roundtable group are working with Christopher Whitaker, civic technologist with Smart Chicago Collaborative, who was instrumental in bringing the aforementioned events to Rockford. Their current goal is to form a *Code for America* (CFA) Brigade, in the northern Illinois region. CFA, which is “A New Kind of Public Service, aims to improve the relationships between citizens and government...help governments restructure to create low-risk settings for innovation, engage citizens to create better services, and support ongoing competition in the govtech marketplace.”



**Christopher Whitaker, civic technologist with Smart Chicago Collaborative
 January 2014 | Rockford Chamber’s Voice Article**