

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL VISITS TOLEDO

Auto-aid chief sees hope

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Work and resources are still needed to aid cities ravaged by an ailing U.S. auto industry, but the situation has improved from a year ago, the man charged with helping those communities said yesterday in Toledo.

“If you think about it, just a year ago General Motors and Chrysler were teetering on the brink. Everybody’s conversations were, ‘Can they get through bankruptcy?’ ” said Ed Montgomery, the federal director of recovery for auto communities and workers.

“Are we out of the woods? Absolutely not. We have a lot more work to be done. But relative to a year ago, it’s a much, much more optimistic picture.”

Mr. Montgomery, an economist and a former dean at the University of Maryland who was deputy secretary of labor under President Clinton, was in Toledo to attend a daylong workshop for manufacturers and suppliers on how to modernize and innovate.

The workshop, attended by about 75 owners or representatives of northwest Ohio companies, was sponsored by the Ohio Department of Development and held at the University of Toledo’s Scott Park Campus of Energy and Innovation.

Mr. Montgomery spoke to seminar attendees and also met with local officials, business leaders, and workers to get a sense of whether federal programs to help cities like Toledo, which are heavily tied to the auto industry, are fulfilling their purpose.

He said that as he travels around the country, he is finding an unevenness to the suffering



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Ed Montgomery, left, federal director of recovery for auto communities and workers, talks at the University of Toledo with Karen Shauri and N. Fatou Ndiaye of the Ohio Department of Development.

caused by the decline of the auto industry. Its sales hit 8 million vehicles last summer, the lowest in 40 years.

Although cities such as Toledo are only now starting to recover slightly, other places, like Fremont, Calif., home to the General Motors-Toyota NUMMI plant, which is closing, are just starting their misery, he said.

The Obama Administration official credited last year's stimulus package for helping turn local economies around.

In Toledo, for example, stimulus funds provided a \$3.5 million grant for improvements at Toledo Express Airport that will save or create over 700 jobs, \$10 million in funds to help stabilize neighborhoods ravaged by foreclosure, and \$7 million to keep police officers on the street.

The stimulus also provided Toledo's **Xunlight Corp.** with a \$34.5 million tax credit to help the solar panel manufacturer begin production.

Another stimulus round would help even more, he added.

New funds could provide more resources for manufacturers, green energy programs, and small business development — such as that being done at the University of Toledo's business incubator, Mr. Montgomery said. The business incubator “takes people with ideas, or very small companies, and they turn them into competitive, bigger entities,” he said. “They're generating millions of dollars of value added for this area. Those are the kind of projects we look to support.”

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