

Homeland-security tech industry group to form

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Michigan's homeland security technology industry might find its voice with a gathering this month called by two western Michigan entrepreneurs.

The Michigan Homeland Security Consortium is hoped to draw several dozen charter members from around the state when it meets for the first time June 21.

"We're doing it in Brighton in order to send a good signal, and that signal is that this is a Michigan organization," said Thomas Hines, president of SecureMatrix, a Grand Rapids security technology start-up.

"So many things get associated with geography or another organization, so while we will very much welcome affiliations with the Automation Alleys of the world and all the other organizations that have their interest groups that might somehow be attracted to homeland security in a broad sense, we are first and foremost a Michiganwide and industry-driven organization," he said.

Hines and Keith Brophy, Grand Rapids-based president of business development for software company NuSoft Solutions, are the acting executives of the group pending its official organization. They envision a not-for-profit group focused on the private sector, technology oriented aspects of homeland security and affiliations with overlapping technology industry organizations, universities, security service companies and other non-core organizations.

Beyond providing networking opportunities and promoting friendly public policy, the founders want to make homeland security technology a driving force in Michigan's economy.

"From our feedback so far, there is a lot of activity out there — it's all kind of under-the-radar activity," Brophy said.

The group's formation comes at a good time for his software company, he said, as it seeks new markets.

"We've been involved in this (industry) space and looking for a way to extend teaming and raise awareness of solutions that are possible," he said. "What we didn't have was a common voice and visibility and great access to security industry teammates."

Long-term goals proposed by the founders include sponsoring a statewide conference and expo next year, launching a Web site, blogs and online content, promoting funding opportunities for members and ultimately fostering creation of start-up companies and research spinoffs.

Homeland security was a component of the state's Technology Tri-Corridor grant program and continues to show promise for economic growth worldwide. One projection by Homeland Security Research Corp. of Washington, D.C., predicts that the international market will grow from \$60 billion in 2006 to \$180 billion in 2015.

The federal government will spend \$6.7 billion on homeland security this year, that company said, mostly allocated to bio-defense, intelligence and warning, nuclear-radiological threats and agriculture and food projects. In bio-defense alone, the company said, eight agencies will spend \$2.8 billion on 62 major programs through 2010.

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