

February 18, 2009

3rd Annual Regional Entrepreneurship Summit Scheduled

“Entrepreneurial Success in a Down Economy.” Does this sound impossible or even contradictory? Many people have an entrepreneurial spirit, but don’t know how to turn their ideas into a profitable, sustainable business. In light of the current economy, the thought of taking such a risk and starting a new business venture may be daunting and a bit scary. However, many experts agree that the entrepreneurial forecast is bright and that there are plenty of business opportunities available out there even in today’s economic environment.

On Tuesday, April 7th, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke with The Thomas Family Center for Entrepreneurship will host the third annual Sandhills Entrepreneurship Summit, a regional forum bringing local business and educational leaders together to discuss entrepreneurial opportunity and success. The event, held in collaboration with the Sandhills Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership (SCEL), will be at Sandhills Community College from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

First on the agenda is Dr. John Parnell, William Henry Belk Distinguished Professor of Business Administration at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, who will explore entrepreneurial opportunities arising out of a challenging economy and how to navigate through the obstacles to achieve success.

This year’s keynote speaker is Dr. Sam Florance, Serial Entrepreneur and Founding Director of Purdue University’s Gateways Program, a business incubation program providing support resources to technology-based new ventures. His presentation, “I Don’t Know What It Is, but I Want It”, is aptly named as he will speak about the seemingly mysterious mechanics of new business endeavors: planning, capital acquisition, development, competitive strategies and growth.

The Summit will also include a business panel discussing the steps to start and grow a successful business, and an education panel focusing on regional resources that support community growth. Following the panel discussions, Leslie Scott, Director of the N.C. Rural Center’s Institute for Rural Entrepreneurship, will provide an update on entrepreneurial activity in rural North Carolina.

Recognizing the increasing role of entrepreneurship as an economic catalyst, Sandhills Community College organized the SCEL to bring together regional partners in a joint effort to enhance entrepreneurship education and to create a network of support and accessible resources for entrepreneurs. These regional partners include Sandhills Community College’s Management and Business Technologies Department, the College’s Small Business Center, UNC-Pembroke’s School of Business, the Moore County Chamber of Commerce, and Moore County Partners in Progress. Through the various initiatives each organization has implemented, this group strives to promote entrepreneurship’s role in achieving positive economic development.

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These initiatives include Sandhills Community College's innovative Entrepreneurship Certificate Program, created in 2005 to provide students with the skills, experience and networks to become successful business owners and entrepreneurial leaders. The College's support services already included the Small Business Center, which has assisted over 300 entrepreneurs and small business owners with business plan preparation, confidential counseling, and networking opportunities.

UNC-Pembroke is providing education, research, and outreach to the regional entrepreneurial community through its Thomas Family Center for Entrepreneurship. Founded in 2006, the Center's mission is to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking among students, as well as assist and support entrepreneurs and new ventures in the southeastern North Carolina region.

The Moore County Chamber of Commerce hosts an annual Entrepreneur Boot Camp for high school students, encouraging them to look at the business world for a rewarding career. Through its Moore County Leadership Institute established in 1988, the Chamber focuses on building leadership skills locally, and uses its Educators Leadership Institute to connect middle school, secondary and post-secondary educators to the business community, giving these educators real-world application for academic instruction in the classroom.

Moore County Partners in Progress spearheaded the creation of Angels for Moore, a confidential angel investor network that brings accredited investors together with local entrepreneurs in an effort to assist entrepreneurs with working capital needs. Created in 2004, Angels for Moore is currently 50 members strong, and members have invested approximately \$500,000 in high-growth companies.

Over 100 regional partners and current and prospective entrepreneurs attended last year's Summit held on March 25, 2008 in Aberdeen. The annual meeting has become a primary conduit for reaching out to local entrepreneurs and informing the community at large about current initiatives and the area's entrepreneurial infrastructure.

"Last year's event increased awareness of these regional efforts and clearly conveyed the correlation between economic growth and entrepreneurial education and development", said Dr. Michael Menefee, The Thomas Family Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship. "Given the national recession, this year's Summit takes on even more importance. In facilitating local entrepreneurship, the Summit will be a direct investment in Moore County's economic future. We appreciate all of the hard work of our partners."

The entrepreneurial spirit is in Moore County, and the Summit is free and open to the public. For more information, contact: Rebecca B. Roberts, Program Coordinator for UNCP @ Sandhills at 910-695-3919 or rebecca.roberts@uncp.edu.