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## New Resources to Help Entrepreneurs

By Ted M. Natt Jr., Business Writer

Moore County entrepreneurs will soon be able to access two new resource networks thanks to separate multi-county grants from the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center.

Moore County Partners in Progress joined with the economic development agencies in Chatham, Harnett and Lee counties to secure a \$10,000 grant to form the [TriSouth Entrepreneurial Network](#).

The cooperative venture between the agencies and the small business centers in each county features [Tools for Business](#), a one-stop resource on the Web offered by the network. Tools for Business combines local, state and national information to help entrepreneurs start and expand their small businesses.

"Entrepreneurs don't necessarily recognize county lines, they recognize opportunities, no matter where those opportunities may exist," says Ray Ogden, executive director of [Partners in Progress](#).

Ogden says the network will provide Moore County with "more tools in our toolbox" for supporting entrepreneurs.

"We have an expanding number of entrepreneurs in the county," he says. "They're an important part of our economy, so we want to do whatever we can to help them."

Meanwhile, the Moore County Chamber of Commerce has partnered with Chambers in Hoke, Richmond and Scotland counties to land a \$10,000 grant to form The Entrepreneurial Network, or T.E.N.

Patrick Coughlin, president and CEO of the Moore Chamber, says the goal is to bridge the gap between the idea and implementation phases of starting a business.

"We've got a lot of support for entrepreneurs in the development stage, and once they're up and operating," Coughlin says. "We want to bridge them from the academic side to the practical side."

The network is currently working on a website, a brochure and scheduling quarterly networking meetings that will rotate among the four counties.

"We are going to integrate T.E.N. into what we're already doing and expose entrepreneurs to a wider audience," Coughlin says. "A true entrepreneur has another one or two ideas that are percolating besides their current one."

He also hopes T.E.N. can become self-sustaining in the future.

"As this goes on, we want the entrepreneurs to be driving the content," Coughlin says. "We want this to be designed around the needs of the entrepreneurs in the four counties. We also feel that we have a much greater chance of sustainability with four chambers involved in the project."

The Entrepreneurial Regions mini-grants were awarded last November by the Rural Center to six regions of three or more rural counties "that work together in building a talent pipeline, support system and friendly climate for their entrepreneurs," according to the Rural Center's website.

Each regional team that received a grant must demonstrate specific measurable progress toward at least one of the three goals of an Entrepreneurial Development System:

- To prepare the next generation of entrepreneurial talent for business development and career opportunities with small businesses in rural communities.
- To improve the coordination and collaboration of business service provider and entrepreneur networks across several counties that share economic drivers.
- To break down local and regional policy and cultural barriers impeding small business development in rural places.

The money must be spent by June 30, and each group must provide information to an evaluation team at the Rural Center that will assess the impact of the \$10,000 investments.

"I like that we're working with other counties more than we have in the past," Ogden says.

In fact, both groups will work together to promote and enhance the fifth annual Sandhills Entrepreneurial Summit on April 12 at Sandhills Community College. The half-day program is designed to put entrepreneurs in direct contact with the resources they will need to succeed.

"It will be the first time we've had this broad a regional opportunity," Ogden says.

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