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LINK@211 Provides Free Valuable Networking Event for Local Businesses

SOMERSET, KY – Strategic social media tips were shared to get small business owners’ ideas brewing at Station 211 on Tuesday.

Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED) hosted its first LINK@211 meeting at the unique coffee bar and entrepreneur collaborative workspace in downtown Somerset at Noon. LINK Southeast Kentucky is a small business networking effort offered and encouraged across Southeast Kentucky. Meetings in Morehead and Prestonsburg have already been successful, beginning in 2016.



Nearly 30 small business owners gathered in the Station 211 basement meeting room for the opportunity to learn, network and gain new skills to market, manage and grow their businesses at a free lunchtime session and served a catered meal provided by the Boar’s Nest.

SKED Small Business Training Specialist Amanda Kelly led the presentation. Kelly, who also teaches SKED’s Entrepreneurial SMARTS small business training program, developed LINK, after teaching several SMARTS classes, where many of the topics addressed at LINK@211 were discussed. When funding for the LINK program became available, Kelly knew this was something small business owners all across the region could benefit from.

“Part of the technical assistance we offer at SKED encourages business owners to build partnerships with small business owners in their backyards as much as possible,” Kelly said.

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“SKED is offering these meetings free of charge, it’s up to the communities to decide whether they’re viable and succeed where we start them.”

LINK@211 attendees represented a broad spectrum of business types. They ranged from local, well-known manufacturing businesses, financial institutions and retail shops to entrepreneurs just getting their foot in the door. Their reasons for attending the event were much the same: learn how social media can be used to market their product or services.

Monticello business owner Carol Whitson made sure she put the meeting on her schedule this month. She wanted to learn how to better market her computer software consulting business, she said following the meeting.

“As a small business owner, and because I serve on the boards of nonprofits, I felt it was important to learn as much information as I could about social media and be able to share it with my customers when they asked similar questions,” she said. “My focus is on ‘the complete business owner,’ and having this information to share with my customers is invaluable.”

Balloon artist and DG Balloons owner Donny Gramling attended to gain valuable tips on marketing his home-based business. Gramling, a trained counselor, left his full-time job in June 2016 to fulfill his small business dream. Since then, he’s been on a quest to learn as much as possible about making his Nancy-based operation a success.

Like many entrepreneurs, Gramling knows his craft well: how to create an appealing balloon bouquet and how to attract a child’s interest while creating his unique balloon animals, but he is the first to tell you he needs help with the business aspect of his company.

“I’m a tech-savvy person, and I didn’t know about search engine optimization and Google analytics,” he confided after the meeting. “I want to learn anything and everything about growing my business and getting my name out there more. This was a great opportunity to do that.”

You may have seen Gramling at Gatti’s Pizza or at a birthday party or special event around the region. His balloon animals were a huge hit at Pulaski County’s Get Active for ALS event in 2016.

Station 211 hosted the lunchtime event at its 211 S. Main St. location.

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Co-owner Adam Gullett said hosting small business networking events like this is just one more way of fulfilling the two-year-old business' mission.

“Our goal is to help strengthen the local economy by encouraging entrepreneurs, both big and small, to work together to create an atmosphere of success and growth here in Pulaski County,” he said. “We are honored to work with SKED and the local chamber of commerce to host this event.”

Future LINK@211 meetings are currently being planned, to cater to local small business owners' needs, as determined by a survey distributed to Somerset/Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce members and at this event, with the assistance of Chamber Ambassador Devin Gaffney.

For more information about LINK@211, contact Amanda Kelly at akelly@centertech.com. For more information about SKED, visit: www.southeastkentucky.com.

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Formed 30 years ago by Fifth District Congressman Hal Rogers to create jobs in Southeast Kentucky, the economic development organization, based in Somerset, serves a 45-county region in Kentucky. Staff works with business owners, small and large, throughout its service area to identify financing solutions to fund their location, expansion and working capital needs.