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Link Southeast Kentucky a Success in Morehead, Ky.

MOREHEAD, Ky. – Eighteen East Kentucky business owners participated in Link Southeast Kentucky’s first three meetings in Morehead, Ky. earlier this summer.

The meetings began at local coffee shop, The Fuzzy Duck, and continued at the Innovation Launchpad in Morehead. Business owners were treated to an open discussion session and a presentation by a local entrepreneur at each meeting.

Business owner Steve Lewis says his participation in the meetings was beneficial.

"The Link meetings are a great venue to bounce ideas off of other small business owners and listen to success as well as failures," Lewis said. "We can all learn something no matter how long we have been in business. I recommend it highly."

Link Southeast Kentucky is Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation (SKED’s) most recent initiative designed to give entrepreneurs and small business owners the information and guidance that will help them grow their businesses and form lasting commercial and personal relationships in their own communities and throughout the region.

Link is a spinoff of SKED’s highly successful Entrepreneurial SMARTS training course. Staff saw the need to expand upon the resources and training provided by SMARTS by giving small business owners a venue to continue the networking begun during the training. Link meetings are free and open to all business owners.

The Morehead community welcomed Link Southeast Kentucky with open arms.

"I think LINK Southeast Kentucky can be a very beneficial program in that it allows the beginning entrepreneur to hear first-hand the pros and cons of being in business for yourself," said Terry Ensor, interim executive director for the Morehead-Rowan County Economic Development Council, Inc. "Experienced and seasoned business owners making the

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presentations gives these people necessary information needed to start a business. They also have given them some excellent marketing ideas.”

“Our first three meetings have been a good start. Hopefully more people will take advantage of LINK in the future and determine if owning their own business is the career path for them,” Ensor added.

SKED Small Business Training Specialist Amanda Kelly says the purpose of Link is to bring small business owners and entrepreneurs together to share ideas and experiences allowing them to help one another grow and prosper.

“Quite often during SMARTS trainings we see students come up with very creative solutions to issues small businesses face, just by having a conversation with each other,” Kelly explained. “This networking event will provide that same opportunity for all small business owners in the area. By learning from the experiences of others, we can overcome hurdles and achieve success together. ”

Link Southeast Kentucky is funded through a partnership between SKED and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The ARC also provides funding for the Entrepreneurial SMARTS training.

“The ARC is pleased to partner with SKED to bring this new entrepreneurial and small business resource to Southeast Kentucky,” said ARC Federal Co-Chair Earl Gohl. “Link Southeast Kentucky will provide a meeting place where business owners can come to share their successes and their struggles and work together to overcome and celebrate. When businesses in a community combine their resources, it’s the community and its residents who benefit most. Success breeds success, and that’s what Southeast Kentucky needs in all of its communities.”

SKED has received funding to initiate Link Southeast Kentucky in three communities in 2015. Sessions are currently being held in Hazard, Ky.

Partners for this initial session of Link Southeast Kentucky include: the Kentucky Innovation Center, Morehead Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Development Center and the Morehead-Rowan County Economic Development Council, Inc. (EDC)

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Entrepreneurial SMARTS is a four-session, 12-hour course designed to provide entrepreneurs with the knowledge and resource materials they need to get a new small business off the ground. This training also provides owners of existing small businesses the skills they need to become more successful and grow their businesses.

Today, a total of 383 aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners have completed entrepreneurial SMARTS training in 31 sessions held across the 45 counties in SKED's service area.

SKED Executive Director Brett Traver says although SKED and ARC are initiating and funding these pilot Link events, it's his hope that each community will take ownership of the meetings and develop and grow them to fit the unique characteristics of their own communities and their needs.

"Helping our Southeast Kentucky businesses grow and prosper has been central to SKED's mission for 29 years," Traver said. With partners like the ARC and others throughout the region, we will continue to help small businesses make money and employ people."

Kelly conducts the Entrepreneurial SMARTS classes. She will also facilitate the initial Link meetings.

For information about LINK Southeast Kentucky, contact Kelly at (606) 416-2008 or by email at akelly@centertech.com. For more information on Entrepreneurial SMARTS or to register for SMARTS training in your area, visit www.southeastkentucky.com. Click on the Training link.

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Formed 29 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.

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CUTLINE: Morehead Link Southeast Kentucky participants are pictured from left: Steve Lewis, Johnathan Gay, Dan Thomas, Terry Ensor, David Barber and Chad Faulkner.