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Moving Forward: Edds-Ellis looks to build community with Greater Owensboro Leadership Institute

By Freddie Bourne Messenger-Inquirer

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Stacy Edds-Ellis, executive director of the Greater Owensboro Leadership Institute, stands Monday in the foyer of the organization's office at 200 E. Third St.

Photo by Freddie Bourne | Messenger-Inquirer

For years, Stacy Edds-Ellis has spent much of her adult life working in the world of higher education.

And now, she's looking to use her experiences and skills to help mold future leaders as the executive director of the Greater Owensboro Leadership Institute.

The non-partisan and nonprofit organization was established in the fall of 2022 through the support of local philanthropic organizations, businesses and community leaders to help "equip people, organizations, communities and networks with the tools to bridge divides, build capacity and tackle shared challenges to become a collective force for change."

Edds-Ellis, 45, is looking forward to this new venture.



“Some folks are intimidated by startups or new things, (but) that excites me,” she said.

Edds-Ellis, a Calhoun native, was dedicated and focused on her education from the get-go.

“Growing up, going to college was real important to me and it was also important for my family,” Edds-Ellis said. “My parents were both the first in their families to go to a four-year college, while my maternal grandfather and grandmother were only afforded the opportunity to go to school for sixth and eighth grade ...; but they were really hard workers and were able to make a great living for their family.

“I always thought, ‘What would they have done if they just had a chance to have more education?’ ”

After graduating from McLean County High School in 1996, Edds-Ellis attended Western Kentucky University for both her bachelors and masters degrees with a focus in organizational communication.

During her graduate program at WKU, Edds-Ellis worked as a graduate assistant in the graduate studies and research office and taught a freshman seminar course before finding employment with Owensboro Community & Technical College in 2002.



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During her 20 years with OCTC, Edds-Ellis wore a number of different hats from teaching and serving as director of the Discover College program before being appointed the dean of academic affairs in 2016 before leaving in September 2022.

She also found time to further her education by receiving her doctorate in administration and organizational development from University of Louisville in 2009 and currently serves as the president of the Goodfellows Club.

Pivoting from higher education to a more focused entity about leadership was something Edds-Ellis found to be a tough decision at first.

“I had a great career and a great experience at the college,” she said. “But I was given the opportunity ... to do something different (which) sounded like the perfect marriage of a few things that I like — I’m still educating folks because I’m working on training. When we lived in Calhoun, I was on city council there so the political and civic engagement side was roped in. And then just working with a lot of different partners to get this off the ground and make it work, which was also something I did at the college.

“It seemed like a good fit of the things I cherish most about my work over the years rolled into one position.”

As of Monday, Edds-Ellis said the organization is “really at the juncture” of beginning to roll out its program initiatives and making the public more aware of the institute with its first open house next week, and beginning its first adaptive leadership cohort of about 25 people.

Initiatives include civic institutes through the Kansas Leadership Center’s adaptive leadership competency training; diversity, equity, inclusion training and support programs; internship programs; women in leadership programs; and more.

Other offerings include an elected office seekers training to be held around the time people begin to file and a leadership summit that is slated for June, with the latter to feature nationally recognized speakers.

“This is really a year of not only developing programming, but also starting to launch it,” she said.

Edds-Ellis stresses that leaders can be anybody who wants to learn, better themselves and offer knowledge.

“The Leadership Institute is founded on the belief that anyone can lead anytime (and) anywhere,” she said. “And by anyone — we mean everyday people; and the reason we believe that is that everyone has an expertise and something to give.

“There’s lots of different projects that will help move our community forward — and by no means am I an expert on all of those — but there’s a lot of people in the community that are.”

The Greater Owensboro Leadership Institute will host its open house from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 31. The office is located on the third floor of 200 E. Third St. A ribbon cutting ceremony will be held for the organization by the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce at 12:15 p.m.

For more information, visit chamber.owensboro.com/greater-owensboro-leadership-institute or contact Edds-Ellis by calling 270-926-1860 or e-mail sedds-ellis@owensboro.com.

