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EDITOR'S PICK

FEATURED

## WKU-G launches student business accelerator

BY MELINDA J. OVERSTREET [moverstreet@glasgowdailytimes.com](mailto:moverstreet@glasgowdailytimes.com) Nov 10, 2018



GLASGOW – Western Kentucky University’s Glasgow campus now has space set aside as a WKU Student Business Accelerator.

Friday was the official launch date, as announced during that morning’s regular meeting of the Barren County Economic Authority, which had perhaps record attendance for the discussion of WKU’s accelerator programs – one for students and one for community members at large – that have been in operation in Bowling Green for several years and now the one here, which has been in the works for more than a year.

The center has a space designated that as many as four separate startup businesses would share, with desks, filing cabinets, computers, copiers, high-speed Internet, etc., and a separate conference room. There is no cost for the student program.



Whitney Peake, director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at WKU, introduced herself and then, right away, two students who have made use of different aspects of the student business accelerator in Bowling Green.

Robert Bowden said he'd already started his business in his parents' garage in October 2015 in Atlanta before coming to college, and now, in his sophomore year, he's expanded Spartan 4x4 to four employees and will probably have six by the end of the year.

"We specialize in a series of things in the aftermarket automotive industry," he said.

It has its own brand of off-road-lifestyle apparel and privately labeled products, and it does personal build consulting, retail physical and online aftermarket parts, plus he plans to open an installation center in Bowling Green later this year at the National Corvette Museum Motorsports Park, said the founder and CEO, and they build custom vehicles.

“We have an office at the Center for Research and Development in the Small Business Accelerator ...,” Bowden said. “Through Western, we’ve had numerous amounts of opportunities.”

He said that his first semester at WKU, his roommate moved out of their dorm room because he was rushing a fraternity, so he paid the extra to be able to keep the other half of the room for his business office. Then he heard about the student business accelerator, which he said was crucial in terms of networking, establishing contacts in the industry, learning about resources, and he sees it as an important program.

“I think one thing that we could work on, especially as the Glasgow campus grows, is just getting just visibility, students’ knowing about it. I talk to students a lot about what they’re wanting to do, but the thing is, they don’t know where to start or where to begin. I think understanding and knowing what’s there and what’s available is the biggest thing,” he said.

Bailey Dahlquist, from the “Chicagoland area,” is the owner of Raw, a cookie dough and ice cream parlor in downtown Bowling Green. A place like this was one of his and his parents’ favorite places to go when he was a kid, he said, so when he came to WKU for his junior year, he decided to try creating one. He continued looking around for a potential location that would work well for him, and he spent a lot of mornings at the health department learning about what the requirements were that he would have to meet for that sort of business, he said.

He eventually signed a lease and opened the doors two months later, selling out of cookie dough every single day for two weeks, Dahlquist said. The first two days, they had a line all the way down the block.

“We had Chaney’s ice cream in there for a little while, and now we have a signed contract with Blue Bell ice cream ...,” he said. “I definitely would not be here without WKU.”

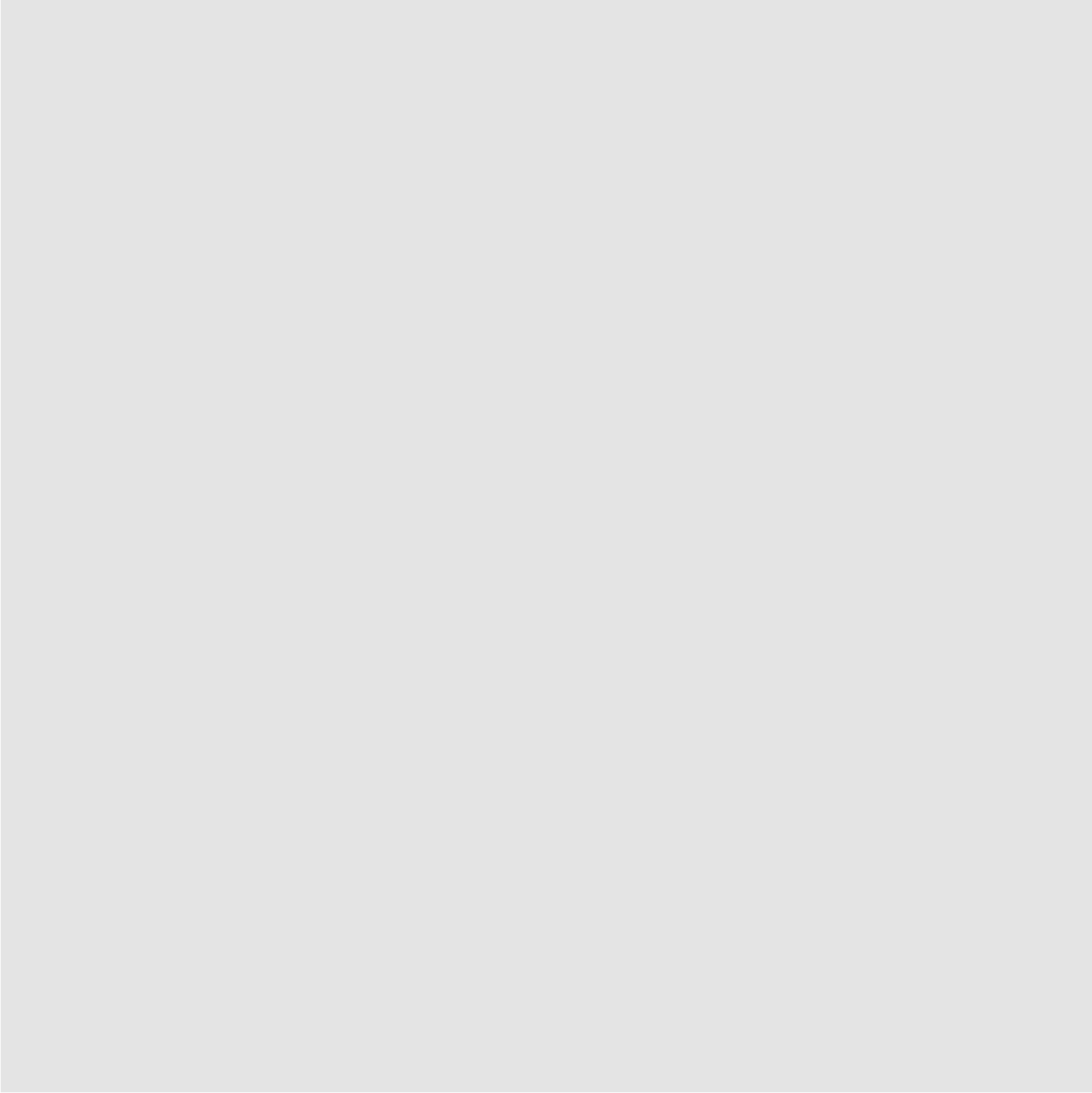
A second location opened Oct. 1, Dahlquist said.

He didn't know about the accelerator program in those early days, so he echoed Bowden's thoughts about increasing visibility.

"I think if that was presented to me, I definitely would have been all over that," Dahlquist said.

He could have had more resources and mentoring from the beginning that way, but he does have mentors now and people he's met through the center that are his "go-to" people if he has questions about expanding or going in different directions, he said.

Peake discussed more about the programs at WKU for students, including an entrepreneurship major or minor, to help them bring their ideas to fruition, and the benefits of working through the accelerator as well.



Jeff Hook, director of the Western Kentucky University Center for Research and Development, which houses and works closely with the accelerator programs, elaborated even further on the options available.

Stephanie Prichard, campus outreach coordinator at WKU-Glasgow, then focused on the launching of the program here.

“We are now ready for students. We are ready to pull them in at any point,” she said, pointing to some photos that were set up near the entrance to the conference room at the downtown Glasgow US Bank location where the economic authority usually meets. “We’ve kind of been building for today. ... So we want you to be our partners. We know that you guys know the community better than anyone.”

Prichard said the people there probably know people in not just Barren County but adjoining counties as well who could be plugged in as mentors, to provide workshops, to give a facility tour, to help with financial information, etc.

“We need those things from you,” she said. “That’s what here today to get from you guys.”

Surveys were there for them to take with them and return to her.

“The biggest thing we can do is help spread the word about this,” Prichard said. “Networking is key. ... We’re also looking for students. Just like Robert and Bailey said, they need to hear about these things.”

The audience also included representatives from Barren County, Glasgow and Caverna school systems and the state representative and state senator whose districts include Barren County.

She said those individuals from the high schools could go ahead and be referring the seniors they have who are getting ready to graduate so they could be talking to her about the possibility.

Beth Laves, associate vice president for the WKU Division of Extended Learning and Outreach, oversees all the university’s regional campuses, and she noted that Dan Iacconi, executive director for the economic authority, had come to her asking for ideas about how to connect the campus with the community and the conversation that led to having the accelerator here developed.

Iacconi provided in an activity report to the authority in September 2017 that initial discussions were taking place in this direction, and in January, Hook came and spoke at an authority meeting to explain more about how the programs work.



“It’s going to take us awhile to grow this. I’m OK with that,” Laves said. “We can start small and get there, but we have space at the Glasgow campus to take this on and utilize it, and what a great way to pull our high school students together, our college students and our community business leaders. I think we’ve got a lot of synergy here that we can really make something that’s pretty exciting, so I hope you’ll be our partners.”

The visit generated discussion among the authority members and some of the other visitors about how they can help the program move forward. The presentation was the only agenda item other than standard finance reports and minutes approval.



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