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EDITOR'S PICK

WKU-BCEA explore collaborative efforts

BY MELINDA J. OVERSTREET moverstreet@glasgowdailytimes.com Feb 9, 2018

Barren County Economic Authority voting member David Peterson, from left, and Glasgow Mayor Dick Doty, a nonvoting member of the authority, listen as Sally Ray, regional chancellor at Western Kentucky University-Glasgow, makes a presentation at the authority's regular meeting Friday about WKU's role in economic development and how it and the authority can collaborate more.

MELINDA J. OVERSTREET/GLASGOW DAILY TIMES



GLASGOW — More than a third of Friday's meeting of the Barren County Economic Authority was devoted to learning about – or being reminded of – some of the goals the organization and Western Kentucky University, particularly the Glasgow campus, have in common and ways they have worked and can continue to work together to improve the community.

Sally Ray, regional chancellor for WKU-Glasgow, had been invited to the meeting by Dan Iacconi, executive director for BCEA, and she discussed some of the ways the university contributes to economic development, the resources it offers and could offer the authority, and some views toward the future.

Direct communication and collaboration between the two has already led to programs like WKU Learn and Earn that grew out of a conversation between Iacconi and Ray, she said, but she also noted the sustainability efforts of Nicole Breazeale, associate professor of sociology, who orchestrated the garden project at the Barren County Detention Center and has worked closely with some area farmers on agricultural sustainability education.

“We're all about partnerships at WKU, and we've had several since I've been here,” Ray said.

As another example of that, she mentioned Hilltopper Institute, through which high school students can enroll in dual-credit coursework.

The list of what WKU “brings to the table,” was lengthy and included internships, workforce training for industries, guest speakers, the small business incubator/accelerator program, and research and technical centers, just for a few.

“It's my hope that, as we move forward with this campus, we will collaborate as a community to identify more of these things that are particularly relevant to move Barren County-Glasgow forward with economic development initiatives,” Ray told the authority members present Friday. “I think it's a really, really exciting opportunity for the community, for this group of economic development leaders to think about how you might leverage the opportunities that WKU, specifically WKU-Glasgow, provides. We're doing a lot of things, you know, to help propel the community, the region, forward, but there's so many other things we can do through collaborative opportunities.”

She said the campus, while it will retain some things, will also be exploring new directions to remain relevant in a changing world.

“For the last year,” she said, “we've been doing our research on what degree programs should we be offering that align with workforce needs in the region. So it's my hope, that in the next year or so, we'll be unveiling a portfolio of five to seven academic degree programs that are aligned with workforce needs in the region.”

Research has shown key areas here to include technology, health care, business and education.

“We know that there will be jobs in the future that do not exist today, so that's our challenge, is really being forward thinking and making sure that we work together with you, the leaders in this community, to make sure that we continue to be relevant in what we do,” Ray said.

Answering questions from authority members Jackie Brown and Scott Young, she said current enrollment is at about 1,400, and she would like to see it grow – and believes it can – to at least 2,000.

Brown asked how the board could contribute toward further advancing WKU-G, and Ray had several suggestions, from being included in the strategic planning to helping develop that portfolio of degree programs of which she had spoken.

In other business, lacconi reported that Farmers Rural Electric Cooperative Corp. had extended a very gracious offer of assistance with rebuilding the authority's website, and is doing so at no cost. Caralyne Pennington, FRECC's director of member and public communications, is the web designer for the utility, lacconi said, and he has been working closely with her to build a resource with all kinds of information about the county that could interest businesses considering the location.

Brown made a motion that the board express its gratitude to Farmers for the help, and Young, who was serving as chair in the absence of Owen Lambert, said he agreed they should do that as a whole and individually. The motion passed unanimously with the other voting members present being David Peterson and Jim Lee. Other voting members absent were Amy Irwin and Gary Hartell.

lacconi also asked the authority members to be thinking about the possibility of a reduction in the price of the speculative building in exchange for particular criteria and what those criteria would be. For example, he said, if a company were hiring “x” number of employees, it could get “x” amount knocked off the price.

“It's time to get that spec building moved,” he said.

Several minutes of discussion also took place regarding the need for BCEA to acquire more property, at least 50 acres, but 100 would be even better, because companies want more space and room for future expansion.

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