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EDITOR'S PICK

FEATURED

Barren County government supports app training program

BY MELINDA J. OVERSTREET moverstreet@glasgowdailytimes.com 15 hrs ago

Ankur Gopal, CEO and founder of Interapt, speaks to computer science students in January at the Barren County Trojan Academy. He told the students what kinds of traits he looks for in new employees.

WILL PERKINS / GLASGOW DAILY TIMES



GLASGOW – Barren County Fiscal Court committed \$30,000 Tuesday to bring a training program – actually two of them for different audiences – for computer-application development here.

But the budget for the project is much larger. Judge-Executive Micheal Hale told the county's governing body that the goal was half a million dollars, but later clarified that is really more of an initial goal to demonstrate to the company the community's level of interest.

He has talked with local school superintendents and gathered support from them, he said, and private investors are also pitching in some of the needed funding.

The program is offered by Interapt Skills, which is based in Louisville but has also done a similar pilot program in Paintsville. According to documents outlining the proposed scopes of work – one for adults, one for high schoolers – Interapt would provide the staff, instructional and class

materials, online resources, marketing material, etc., and provide an end-of-program job fair to engage graduates with potential employers and “may consider” hiring some, but it makes no guarantees for job placements.

The local partner organizations, like the county government, would be responsible for providing raising the funds to cover the related expenses; providing a location – and Hale said Western Kentucky University-Glasgow would be doing that; for guiding Interapt to appropriate media channels for marketing and outreach, etc.

Adult students would get a stipend of \$425 a week and will be training full time, five days a week for six months. High school students would attend training four hours a day for one semester and would not receive a stipend but could receive apprenticeship credit.

The anticipated expenses for the adult program, instruction for which would tentatively begin in mid-June, total \$1,305,812, with an estimated \$510,000 of that just for the stipends. The anticipated expenses for the high school program, which would be during the fall 2018 semester, total \$587,300. Those figures are based on classes of 50 people. The grand total gets close to \$2 million.

Hale said after the meeting that the company has been asked to reduce that number to 25 for starters, which would also reduce the costs some.

Students would be taught to create mobile applications through one of two modules: Swift/iOS or Java/Android.

In the adult program, the first four months would focus on “guided in-class instruction” and the last two months would focus on “a real-life capstone project with an Interapt client, Interapt product team or other coding opportunity,” according to the proposal documents.

Interapt would provide programmed laptops for all students in both cases that would be stored on-site, but for the adult courses, successful graduates would get to keep the laptops. The laptops being used by high schoolers would be owned by Interapt, according to the documents.

Hale said that having qualifications for app-development technology jobs would help today's youths have more incentive to stay in the area, and the adult training program, while open to any adult applicant, could be a great opportunity in particular for employees displaced by the closure of their previous employment facility.

The judge-executive said he sees this as an opportunity we can't pass up, and it has the backing of several Kentucky government departments, he said.

Having more employees available with these skills can, in turn, attract other types of companies here.

“We have to diversify our economy. We have to attract businesses in a different way than we have before,” Hale told the fiscal court. “We're not focused on our future; we're working on our future, right now.”

He said this project has been in the works for more than a year now, and company representatives have been here three times working to connect with potential community partners. Interapt wants to attract an information technology market from Elizabethtown to Nashville, he said.

One of those trips here, in January, included a visit by Interapt CEO Ankur Gopal with Barren County High School students who were studying coding, and Gopal made a big and positive impression on BCHS sophomore Savannah Moon, who said that one of the beautiful things about computer science is that you can learn it if you just have the drive, and you can do the work from just about anywhere.

After a few questions from other fiscal court members, Magistrate Charles Allen asked whether the county had enough funds to cover Hale's suggested contribution amount in the current fiscal year.

“We can make it work,” the judge-executive said.

Magistrate Carl Dickerson had asked whether the Glasgow government or the Barren County Economic Authority had committed funds, and Hale said they had not yet, but Mayor Dick Doty has been at all three Interapt meetings, and two voting members of BCEA, of which Hale is a nonvoting member, were present at the fiscal court meeting if the magistrates had other questions of them.

BCEA member Jackie Brown said he had been at two of those three meetings and was impressed, not only with the company itself but also the support it has received from the state government.

“I fully endorse it,” he said.

Hale told the fiscal court that if it so desired, it could make its funding contingent on funding from other entities, but Allen said he did not desire to make that part of his motion. He just wanted Hale to ensure the county had the money.

With all members present, the motion to provide the funds was unanimous.

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