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EDITOR'S PICK

WKU Learn and Earn, Caverna TOPS help students earn money for school

BY GINA KINSLOW gkinslow@glasgowdailytimes.com 14 hrs ago

SEYMOUR

GINA KINSLOW/Glasgow Daily Times



CAVE CITY — Leslie Witty shared information Tuesday during the Cave City Chamber of Commerce's second quarterly breakfast about a scholarship program offered through Western Kentucky University that helps college students, as well as area businesses.

The program is called WKU's Learn and Earn Program, and it is based on two questions. The first of which is: Why do people drop out of college?

“Money is the reason that most people drop out. There may be other life circumstances, but at the core it's money,” said Witty, program project manager. “Study after study shows that the average amount a student is short as far as being able to pay for school is \$1,500, so it's not a huge amount but that is enough to cause a student to drop out.”

The second question is: Why do people quit entry level jobs?

Human resource managers across the area have told Witty that it is very common for their businesses to spend money training employees only to have them to leave after a short period of time.

While there could be a lot of reasons why people choose not to stick it out, Witty said her personal theory is people don't consider what effect it will have on the businesses.

“For every entry level employee that business has, if that employee does not stay with that business a minimum of one year, that business loses on average \$5,000,” she said. “You have to look at big picture items like advertising, cost of background checks, cost of training and downtime. You have all these different factors that add up and that's the average amount, so that's a pretty big hit.”

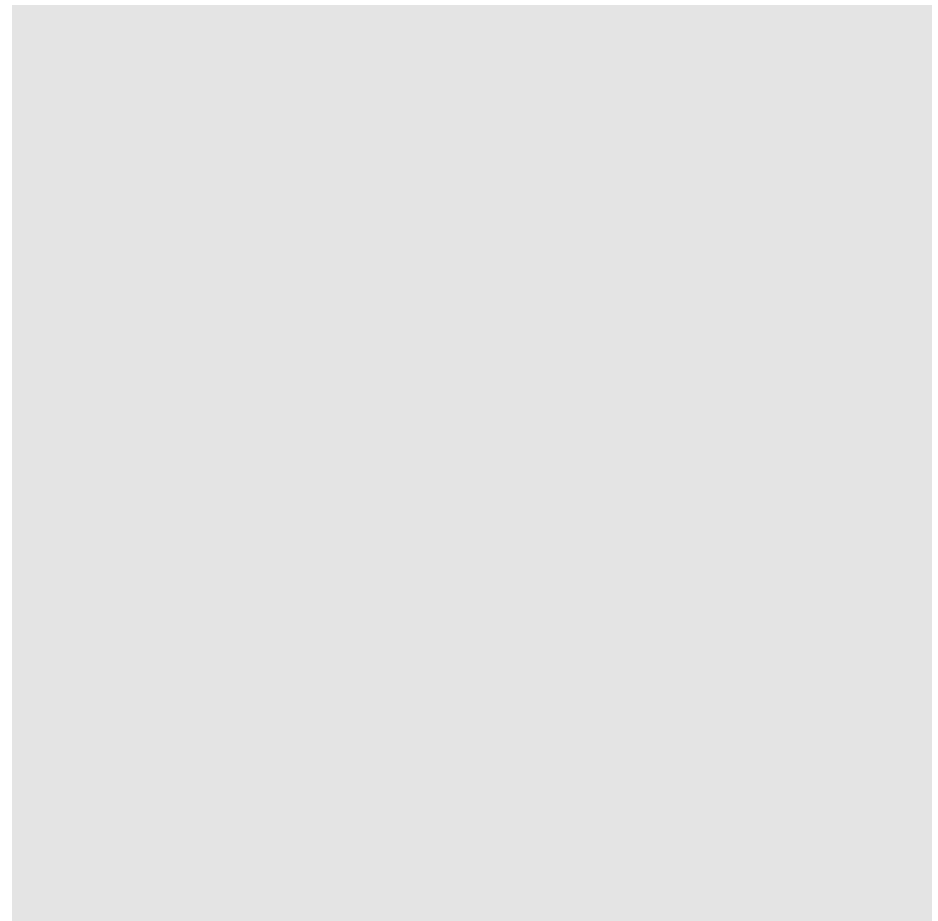
With WKU's Learn and Earn Program, students who need money to fund tuition are matched with businesses who need to fill entry level positions.

“We recruit students who are in a place where they need financial assistance. Some of them don't receive any from home. Some of them are nontraditional students. The stories are different,” she said. “They have a financial need and they also have a will and determination to stick it out.”

Witty works with the college students and helps them gain the skills and training they need to interview for entry level positions.

If the students prove to be successful in the jobs, at the end of the semester, in addition to their wages, they will receive scholarships they can apply to their tuition.

“Actually, the scholarship is donated to the College Heights Foundation and WKU Learn and Earn awards it to the student,” she said. “What you are looking at is instead of \$5,000 walking out your door over and over, you're looking at investing in



Witty

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a student. And if that student quits or that student is let go, there's no scholarship. So really, there's no risk, but for the student who succeeds, they are going to keep going.”

Some students who have participated in the program have been with the same employer for four to five semesters.

“These students are not necessarily looking for an apprenticeship or an internship or a co-op or a work study. They are at a different place,” she said. “We are trying to get these students to where they have work experience. They have a good soft skill base and then after some work experience they are ready for an internship and then they are ready for an apprenticeship.”

Amanda Abell, assistant superintendent of the Caverna Independent School District, also spoke at the breakfast. She explained Caverna High School has a program similar to WKU Learn and Earn. It is called Caverna TOPS, which stands for Transforming Outcomes through Performances and Scholarships.

Through Caverna TOPS high school students are placed in entry level positions at area businesses for either an entire semester or a specific period of time. When that time frame lapses, the high school students receive scholarships they can use to pay for dual-credit courses.

“I can think of a situation right now with one of our gifted and talented students who works as many hours as he possibly can just to help sustain his family,” Abell said.

“That's a student who would love to take dual-credit (courses) but there is no way his family could possibly afford it.”



Abell

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With Caverna TOPS, he can earn a scholarship he can apply toward the cost of taking dual-credit courses.

CHS has four students in Caverna TOPS who have been placed in jobs in the community.

“We have one more who still needs to be placed, but these students go through a program with Leslie where she works on soft skills with them,” Abell said.

Such soft skills include knowing the importance of being a good employee, getting to work on time, not missing days and not being on a cell phone while at work.

“Little things like that we sometimes think kids already know, but they really don't,” she said.

Nancy Seymour, owner of the Sahara Steak House in Cave City, shared with those who turned out for the breakfast her experience in hiring a 16-year-old student through the program to work at her restaurant.

“This child is amazing. I can't believe that a 16 year old has the work ethic that she has,” Seymour said. “She has a lot of heartache right now, but she comes to work and she leaves all of that at the back door. I feel so blessed to be a part of this program. I encourage you all, if you have any openings, to try one of their students. I don't think you will be disappointed.”

For more information about the programs or how to get in touch with those who work with the programs, contact the Cave City Chamber of Commerce at 270-773-5159.

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