

Riv-Ell program to challenge future business leaders

First 10 Lincoln, Riverside seniors enroll in “unprecedented” collaborative effort among BC3, CCBC, E.C. chamber and benefactors

May 11, 2018

(Ellwood City, PA) Ten Lincoln and Riverside high school seniors this fall will be the first to capitalize on a new Butler County Community College and Community College of Beaver County initiative whose instructors and mentors will guide the transformation of students’ ideas into feasible business plans, and culminate in 16 tuition-free transferrable credits – and a resume-building workplace certificate.

BC3 and CCBC, in concert with the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce and Ellwood City area businesses, have created the yearlong Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program, which will blend classroom learning with real-world experience.

BC3 and CCBC faculty will instruct high school seniors in financial literacy, psychology, entrepreneurship, marketing, public speaking and business plan development Monday through Thursday afternoons during the school year in the banquet room of Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ, 324 Wampum Ave.

Friday afternoon field trips will provide students the chance to network with, and gain insight from, successful Ellwood City area business leaders, said Raymond Santillo, executive director of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce.

“Students will visit and hear from them first-hand,” Santillo said. “So often in school you hear only from the teachers. Our teachers do a great job, but after 12 or 13 years, you are ready for something different.”

That something different is the Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program, said Kevin McElwain, a sponsor of what he calls an “unprecedented effort of collaboration” among BC3, CCBC, Lincoln, Riverside and Ellwood City community and business leaders.

“The program is designed to bring an alternative learning platform to students who will be challenged to perform academically at the collegiate level while earning college credit,” said McElwain, a longtime business owner and current owner of Good Wheels Inc., Ellwood City.

“With the program in place, the ultimate success of the endeavor lies with the students. To me, this is an investment in our community and furthers the longtime tradition of knowing that ‘What Ellwood City Builds, Builds Ellwood City.’”

Dr. Nick Neupauer, president of BC3, a 1985 Lincoln High graduate and Ellwood City native, agrees.

“It is such an exciting aspect of the program to allow students from Lincoln and Riverside to work on a project that,” Neupauer said, “can ultimately help Ellwood City.

“I am so proud of my hometown. The Ellwood City community has stepped up to allow students from Lincoln and Riverside to enroll in the Riv-Ell program tuition-free. They did so by contributing money as well as time in getting this concept off the ground. What a tribute to the citizens, businesses and service organizations.”

CCBC, said Dr. Chris Reber, the college’s president and an Ellwood City resident, is proud to partner with BC3 and with “the vibrant Ellwood City business community to provide career pathways and experiential learning opportunities for Ellwood area students.

“By integrating classroom learning and real-world experience,” Reber said, “students will have inspirational opportunities to test their business ventures and work with others to identify viable business plans.”

Students who successfully complete all 16 credits will earn a BC3 Workplace Certificate in Entrepreneurship – a relevant credential while still in high school – and be prepared to launch or enhance a successful business venture or continue on an academic path to earn an associate in applied science degree in business.

“All tuition-free,” echoed Erin Cioffi, BC3’s assistant director of high school programming, and as a result of an initiative that brings a “combined vision to life” in her hometown of Ellwood City, said Joyce Cirelli, CCBC’s dean of high school academies and dual enrollment.

BC3’s Workplace Certificate in Entrepreneurship represents a work-ready, post-secondary academic achievement.

All credits articulate to BC3 and CCBC, and most transfer to any senior institution depending on the major the senior ultimately selects.

Students will also gain exposure to contemporary trends in education by taking one course online. The entrepreneurs will ultimately design a capstone project – “specifically created for this group,” said Dr. Christian Ola, BC3’s dean of business – that focuses on ideas targeting economic development and enhancing quality of life in the Ellwood City area.

“By analyzing Beaver and Lawrence counties prior to creating their business proposal, the students will develop a sense of social entrepreneurship rather than simply making another business,” Ola said. “This matters in so many ways. The community benefits by having a new, vibrant business and the students benefit by working through a clearly defined process that is essential to help ensure their business has a chance of not only surviving, but thriving in the hometown area.”

Ben Huth and April Thellman, guidance counselors at Riverside and Lincoln high schools, respectively, said the generosity of Ellwood City area businesses was crucial in launching the program for their students.

Financial gifts “have allowed the students to take advantage of the college courses and certificate for free,” Huth said. “Our local businesses have truly stepped up.”

“We have a wonderful community that is funding this program so that each student receives 16 college credits along with a workplace certificate,” Thellman said, “at no expense to the student.”

The program’s tuition and books will be free as a result of gifts from the following:

Cohort Sponsor: First National Bank of Pennsylvania;

Course Sponsor: The Hoyt Foundation;

Future Entrepreneur Sponsors: Armstrong, IPSCO and Smokin’ Dave’s BBQ;

Program Partners: Ellwood City Wolves Club; Frank and Carolyn C. McElwain; Good Wheels Inc.; Home Instead Senior Care; Hungarian Home; Kevin and Debra R. McElwain (Good Wheels); and WesBanco Bank Inc.

Program Supporter: Air Physical Therapy and Fitness.