

KU links grads, businesses

The University of Kansas School of Business has launched a new program designed to keep rural businesses open.

The Redefining Retirement program – nicknamed RedTire – will match graduates who want to own a business with business owners looking to retire, officials said. The program is aimed at preventing rural businesses from closing because an owner can't find a successor.

"Every day in rural communities, businesses close forever because an owner retires and can't find someone to take over the business," said Neeli Bendapudi, dean of the School of Business. "This is crucial to rural Kansas communities that depend on the services, jobs and tax revenue that these businesses provide. RedTire will address this issue by matching graduates with current business owners and facilitating a succession plan to keep the business running."

In effect, RedTire is a match-making service. Program staff will screen prospective replacement managers and candidate businesses, then identify good matches. From there, the program will help them negotiate the purchase

and transition of ownership terms, help the new owner obtain a business purchase loan and monitor and help them successfully run and grow their business.

The program will be supervised by two groups – a board of advisors and a board of governors – which include a number of highly regarded Kansas entrepreneurs and business leaders.

"Nearly 13,000 businesses in Kansas have owners who plan to retire in five years but do not have succession plans in place," said Wally Meyer, a RedTire director and the director of entrepreneurship programs for the school. "So there's certainly a need for this type of program in rural Kansas."

RedTire will assemble teams of graduates to provide the multidisciplinary capabilities that successfully managed companies require. For example, RedTire would team a pharmacy student and an MBA student to work together on purchasing a pharmacy, rather than have either do so alone. Ownership teams will be built across the core industries of business, pharmacy, medicine and agriculture.

RedTire is available to all graduates of a Kansas Regents institution and to all Kansas business

owners. Services are free. For details or to apply for services, go to www.redtire.org.

Meyer said he first developed the idea for RedTire a few years ago when he was visiting with an economic development official from Goodland.

"The economic developer told me, 'We have no one to succeed our small business owners when they retire,'" Meyer said. "And subsequent research proved that this need is nationwide, and likely to increase due to the growing number of expectant retirees who are part of the baby boomer population now reaching retirement age. RedTire can help fill this successor void with Kansas Regents institutions' educated labor pool, as well as alumni looking to return to the heartland."

The program has been in the planning stages since 2009. Since then, countless presentations about RedTire have been given to economic development officials, business owners, bankers and others statewide. The RedTire idea won best business concept in June 2009 at the U.S. Department of Commerce-sponsored University Center Showcase and in various annual showcases since then.

New paint job for church



CYNTHIA HAYNES/Colby Free Press
Connie Brown, Gem, and Jocelyn Bencken, Oakley, of Starlight Painting, were up on ladders bright and early Saturday morning painting the trim on the College Drive Assembly of God Church.

Greenhouse keeps soldiers busy

More than 30 people from Fort Riley, Kansas State University and the area community have teamed to build a greenhouse that will serve as important therapy for soldiers hurt in the line of duty.

Officials from the post and university cut the ribbon July 2 to officially open the post's indoor garden, which one army officer says will be an ally for soldiers who have suffered concussions or other traumatic brain injury in battle.

Col. Craig Webb, the deputy commander for clinical services at Fort Riley, said that since 2000, 125,000 U.S. soldiers have suffered a traumatic brain injury, which essentially damages the frontal lobe of the brain and affects their memory and ability to sequence events.

"For the soldiers, it's an excellent opportunity to train and learn new skills while they're recovering from their traumatic brain injury," Webb said. "They can learn to take care of plants, they can learn sequential events, they can learn to hone their memory."

The project is the result of a grant from the Parsons-based Assistive Technology for Kansans, and K-State Research and Extension's Kansas AgrAbility project, which focuses on helping people with disabilities working in agriculture-related occupations.

Kerri Ebert, who coordinates the state's AgrAbility program, said her group was able to buy the greenhouse (called a high tunnel) as well as tools, and

equipment that soldiers will need to grow crops.

Elain Donnoe, a Fort Riley occupational therapist working with the Warrior Transition Unit at the post, noted that many soldiers receive multiple concussions while on active duty. "So their ability to stabilize emotions is really an issue; working on stress relief is really important."

Ebert calls the high tunnel "a giant erector set," standing eight feet tall on the sides with an approximately 16-foot-tall ceiling. The floor space is 42 feet by 30 feet. "They could grow a tree in there, if they wanted to," she said.

It took volunteers several weeks to build the high tunnel, including K-State faculty, citizens from the Manhattan area; and Fort Riley soldiers.

In addition to aiding in physical therapy, officials said the high tunnel may also provide soldiers with a job option after their military career.

"For young men and women (this high tunnel will provide) exposure to vocational options that will be available to them when they're discharged," Ebert said. "It's a natural part of what AgrAbility does; we work with farmers ... and people who want to be farmers."

Soldiers will begin working in the high tunnel soon, officials said. Ebert noted that additional equipment will be provided to accommodate soldier's specific needs.

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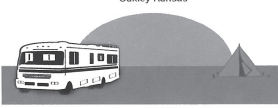
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