



MSU partnering with regional young professional organization

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Morehead State University has agreed to become a platinum level supporter of a regional nonprofit called Young Professionals of East Kentucky or YPEK. An organization that seeks to link young leaders from across Kentucky's 5th Congressional District, YPEK creates opportunities for young professionals to grow individually, socially and professionally while developing forward thinking, innovative approaches that will improve the communities of East Kentucky.

Founder Kevin Smith, director of strategic initiatives at the Inez Deposit Bank, said the organization's mission can be broken down into three words: "connect, grow, and lead."

All three are vital, stresses Smith.

"First we get young leaders collaborating together on issues impacting East Kentucky, allowing ourselves opportunities to learn and grow as leaders, and then we aim our energies towards leadership to benefit the region," he added.

MSU President Wayne D. Andrews said he's excited about the potential for the group to partner with the university on its strategic priorities. "One of the University's strategic goals is to establish productive partnerships within our service region. We want to work with these partners to create livable communities, an innovative economy, and a socially inclusive region. The work these young professionals are engaged in fits perfectly with our regional objectives."

One area where MSU looks to partner with YPEK is regional engagement, particularly where students are concerned. Dr. J. Marshall, executive director for MSU's Center for Regional Engagement, said his center serves as a conduit for students, faculty, and staff to identify regional needs and provide services and resources to groups such as YPEK.

"Our goal is to find ways to improve the quality of life throughout MSU's service region in areas such as community and entrepreneurial development, education, and health care."

"Young Professionals of East Kentucky will be an ideal partner as the individuals involved can provide the Center with a strong, grassroots link to their local communities. The Center for Regional Engagement recognizes that any real change -- change that will sustain itself over time -- has to take place at the local level. And the individuals that will affect that change will need to be involved and trusted members of those communities," said Dr. Marshall.

Johnathan Gay, with MSU's Economic Development Institute, and a founding board member of YPEK, said he thinks MSU's outreach goals will dovetail perfectly with YPEK's efforts.

"One of the things YPEK did from the beginning is form committees dedicated to various topic areas. There are committees on education, energy and the environment, civic engagement, economic development, technology, and healthcare. Each offers unique opportunities for MSU's students, faculty and staff to roll up their sleeves and get involved within the region," said Gay.

Young Professionals of East Kentucky holds regular meetings across Eastern Kentucky. For more information on YPEK, visit its web site at www.ypek.org. To learn more about MSU's efforts to partner with the organization contact Johnathan Gay at jgay@kyinnovation.com.



From left, Congressman Hal Rogers, Kevin Smith, YPEK founder, and former Gov. Paul Patton.