



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



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Boone County events spark conversation about small business growth, *by Cynthia McComas*



In Boone County, volunteers are providing an opportunity for current and aspiring small business owners to network, gain new skills, and obtain resources on entrepreneurship. A series of events called the Madison Meet-Ups are bringing small business owners together to discuss how they can support one another in a struggling economy.

The idea for the events came about from a brainstorm of the Madison Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities team in the county seat of Boone County. The Hub provided several mini-grants to fund community projects in



Madison, including the Meet-Ups, a small business street fair, a youth-led kayaking event, and a small business directory.

Kandi Workman, a Madison volunteer and community advocate, took the lead on the Meet-Ups and planned three events over three months. “[The goals of the events are to] get people together, listen to them, provide resources, make community connections, and do all of this over food and communion,” said Workman.

Boone County was once known for its booming coal economy, but as the industry has slowed, residents need to find alternative means of income. “The economic shift in Boone County has changed too rapidly for people to adjust, financially and culturally, and this leaves us with an immediate sense of desperation,” said Workman. She wants to alleviate that desperation in any way she can.

At past events, Jesse Ramey hosted a YouTube Marketing workshop and Jamie Cope from the Robert C. Byrd Institute spoke about how his organization can help entrepreneurs with manufacturing. Even meals and desserts are provided by local businesses, like Ma & Pa’s BBQ and Stephani’s Sweet Treats.

In addition to these presentations, maybe the most important part of the events is to simply get people talking. “Lots of people want to see change, but sometimes they are lost as to how even see beyond the present day circumstances,” said Workman. These events help community members look positively to the future. Workman says that the Meet-Ups provide valuable resources to business owners, but building relationships is her priority. “[The events are] just as much about evoking empathy for your community members and creating a culture of resilience through relationships,” said Workman.

The next Madison Meet Up will be held on April 27th at the Boone Heritage Center in Madison from noon to 1:00 pm.

