



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



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Program hopes to grow opportunity in local communities,

by Fred Kight

Dan Vorisek’s goal is to make Nelsonville and Amesville places “where people want to live versus want to leave.”

While the towns have desirable qualities, they both suffer from lack of opportunity. Vorisek has just started working on that problem as an Entrepreneurial Communities coach.

“Essentially, my role will be to assist communities to organize a core leadership group that wants to see local businesses grow and thrive,” said Vorisek. In addition to Nelsonville and Amesville, the new Rural Action staff member will work with five other small towns in southeast Ohio.

Nick Tepe is one of the local people who’s stepped forward in Nelsonville to work on the project. He’s director of Athens County Public Libraries.

“The library has many resources already available to help new businesses and entrepreneurs, and we are looking for ways to expand those resources based on feedback from groups like this,” Tepe said.

“Each leadership team will go through an intensive assessment and strategy process to determine the best path forward for their entrepreneurs,” Vorisek explained.

“As a community coach my job is... to guide the teams to find out what resources they have in their community to support their entrepreneurs, and to come up with a strategy that keeps the support going for the long term.”



Eric Smith, chief program officer at Rural Action, left, and Dan Vorisek talk at the agency’s Appalachian Conference on Social Enterprise in May

Growing new and existing business is something Rural Action has been doing for years. But this new Entrepreneurial Communities initiative represents a more intense effort, according to Vorisek, and is larger in scope.

“A big part of the success of this project will be the shift in how the communities view their economic development,” said Vorisek. “Entrepreneurial communities attract new investment, new families and new



business ventures. They become places (with) diverse employment options, greater resilience to hardships, and are more likely to provide prosperity for the long term.”

An initial meeting was held in April in Nelsonville. Tepe was among 15 or so who attended.

“I believe that the library is in a great position to make this happen for Nelsonville, and the Entrepreneurial Communities project is exactly the sort of effort that the library can support to help strengthen Nelsonville and improve the quality of life for all residents,” Tepe said. “Assisting small businesses is one of the most important services the library can offer to the community.”

How did Nelsonville and Amesville get chosen to participate in the project?

“These are communities that Rural Action has had successful working relationships with in the past, and are also ripe for an input of energy to really help their local business thrive,” Vorisek said. “The Entrepreneurial Communities framework should fit well with the way that these communities are already growing their businesses...”

In addition to hiring new employees and generating new revenue for the local economy, Vorisek wants the leaders of Nelsonville and Amesville to realize that they have the physical assets, the knowledge and the ability to direct their own prosperity.

“Hope, and the belief that choices we make today can create the future we want are possibly the most beneficial attributes a community can possess,” he said. “If this project can instill that belief in the residents of our local communities, I believe that the future economy of Appalachia Ohio will look very differently from what has been experienced in the past.”

But it will take time.

“The Entrepreneurial Communities initiative was launched in early 2017,” Vorisek said. “There are several phases of implementation over the next two to three years that will hopefully put the pieces in place to sustain work that we have started.”

Vorisek, an Ohio University alumnus, returned to the area from the Catskills of New York to taking the coach job. He has spent 20 years working in higher and outdoor education organizations around the country and has lived most of his life in rural places. Vorisek and his wife live in Amesville.

