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Small Business Development Center Opens at Illinois Wesleyan

March 1, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— The McLean County Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Illinois Wesleyan University will provide assistance to small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs throughout the county when the SBDC begins regular hours of operation on March 27.

Located on the third floor of State Farm Hall on the Illinois Wesleyan campus, the SBDC will support entrepreneurs as they strive to develop new businesses and serve as a resource to help existing businesses to grow and remain competitive. Free business consulting and low-cost training services to be offered include: business plan development, manufacturing assistance, financial packaging and lending assistance, exporting and importing support, disaster recovery assistance, procurement and contracting aid, market and customer research assistance, healthcare guidance, and support in the 8(a) Business Development Program, for firms owned and controlled at least 51 percent by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.

“Illinois Wesleyan is delighted to build upon our rich relationships with Bloomington-Normal,” said Provost Jonathan Green. “By providing the community with an accessible resource for professional support of small-business development, this will also provide numerous opportunities for our students to engage with the SBDC and to undertake a variety of internships and projects in support of local entrepreneurship.”



Director Karen Bussone (far left) and Illinois Wesleyan Provost Jonathan Green receive a proclamation from Representative Keith Sommer and Representative Dan Brady (far right) at an event launching the McLean County Small Business Development Center.



Media were among the crowd assembled for the announcement of the SBDC at Illinois Wesleyan.

At a March 1 event launching the SBDC, Green noted many of the founders of Illinois Wesleyan in 1850 were small business owners. “They, too, dreamt of what might be when they took a chance and invested in the future of the community and the young peoples’ whose lives would be transformed here,” Green said.

Noting that although Illinois Wesleyan has a global view and mission, Illinois Wesleyan nonetheless “has always been of this place,” Green said. “It is only fitting then that as an institution born from the entrepreneurial spirit of the community, that we should be the place where members of Bloomington-Normal and the surrounding communities can kindle the flames of their own entrepreneurial spirit and be helped to make manifest their dreams of a brighter future.”

Heading the McLean County SBDC as director is Karen Bussone. A visiting professor of business administration at Illinois Wesleyan for the past nine years, Bussone has taught courses in marketing, management, entrepreneurship and financial management. She has incorporated business plan and marketing plan writing as semester-long projects and has developed student/service provider project opportunities from local small business and nonprofit sectors.

“Karen brings a wealth of business experience and a history of successful integration of academic work with business development,” said Green. “I am particularly excited with her appointment as director of the SBDC.”

At the launch event, Bussone said the University is delighted to build upon relationships with Bloomington-Normal, and pleased to provide the community with professional support for business development. As an educator, she said she is pleased the SBDC will provide Illinois Wesleyan students with internship opportunities and projects in support of local entrepreneurs.

Prior to joining Illinois Wesleyan, she worked for 21 years in marketing, strategic leadership, manufacturing operations and distribution for Kellogg’s, Kraft Foods and Dot Foods. With Kellogg’s, Bussone launched several new products in various manufacturing facilities across the United States, Mexico and Europe. Bussone also led Kraft’s divestiture efforts of the Parkay brand to Nabisco. She holds a bachelor’s degree in food science from Drake University, and an MBA from Western Illinois University.

SBDCs throughout the United States are hosted by universities in collaboration with regional Economic Development Councils, and funded in part through a partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration. Kyle Ham, CEO of the Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council, said in his remarks at the March 1 launch event that a previous iteration of the SBDC in the community closed due to state funding.

“Our team at the EDC saw the immediate need to have this type of support for start-up businesses but also for existing businesses that are trying to grow in our community,” he said. The EDC indicated an interest in applying for an SBDC, but after conversations with Illinois Wesleyan officials and the McLean County Chamber of Commerce, leaders determined Illinois Wesleyan would be a good home for a new iteration of the SBDC.

The SBDC begins regular hours of operation (Monday-Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) on March 27. Free parking is available in the parking lot next to the Hansen Student Center, 300 Beecher St. For more information, call (309) 556-3171 or email Bussone at kbussone@iwu.edu.



As an institution whose founders included many small business owners, Provost Jonathan Green said it is fitting that Illinois Wesleyan be the place where community members "can kindle the flames of their own entrepreneurial spirit."

