

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A Publication of NACCE

SPRING/SUMMER 2017



**Spurring
Entrepreneurial
Growth**



Small Towns, Big Potential

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Springtime is here and the flowering trees provide fresh color in contrast to the drab winter landscape. After being planted decades ago, the trees reawaken every year as temperatures climb.

Much like the natural ecosystem that nurtured these trees over the years, a properly designed entrepreneurial ecosystem can help human potential flourish. However, this ecosystem must be balanced with many different components to spur entrepreneurial growth.

One of the most critical is ensuring that individuals, organizations, and communities are exposed to an entrepreneurial mindset. This mindset is the seed, that when planted in a strong ecosystem, can create tremendous results. Unfortunately, many communities today haven't put enough resources and focus into developing their entrepreneurial ecosystems.

of entrepreneurial activity shifted away from smaller communities and became concentrated in a select few urban areas.

Leadership Required

Struggling small communities *can* find a way forward. Creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem to address these problems requires leadership from community colleges, local government and business leaders, and everyday citizens. Some colleges are leading the way through ELI's Ice House Entrepreneurship Program, which is starting to bear fruit in locations throughout the country. *How?* By planting the entrepreneurial mindset seed in students and facilitators.

NACCE member Independence Community College (ICC) in Independence, Kansas, has been a leader in nourishing the entrepreneurial mindset by providing

"Having a 'knack' for entrepreneurship is not some innate talent or gift that successful people are born with, but something that can be developed by and within anyone," observed Joanne. "Learning from others who had been through the same gamut of fear, uncertainty, struggle and joy that I was experiencing gave me more confidence to stick to it and create my own path." Her initial idea came from an Ice House course that was the result of the Ice House Opportunity Discovery Process, which led her to start a thriving business in public relations and marketing.

Lighting the Fire

When the environment is ripe, even a short, three-day exposure to the entrepreneurial mindset can have a significant impact. Marietta College is a small liberal arts school in Ohio's coal country. After attending Ice House Facilitator Training for professional development as an administrative coordinator at Marietta, Laura Pytlik saw an opportunity for local artisans to display and sell their handiwork. This led to a successful outdoor market, "Marietta Marketplace," which eventually led to a new brick and mortar establishment, "Wit & Whimzy." "The training connected me to others who helped me realize the potential my idea had to grow and be successful," Laura said. "The outdoor marketplace evolved into a social enterprise that could actually provide a regular income."

Nurturing entrepreneurial growth helps create a thriving environment. The same way that communities develop economic prosperity for their residents, community colleges focused on providing nutrients to assist their constituents' entrepreneurial activity will help ensure that decades from now they will still be seeing the results of their efforts blossoming. ●

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LAURA PYTLIK

Historically, small-town America has been a hotbed of entrepreneurial activity. However, data from the bipartisan Economic Innovation Group (EIG), demonstrates that during the economic recovery in the early 1990s, counties with fewer than 100,000 residents contributed at the highest rate in adding new businesses to the economy. In fact, 50 percent of the total growth during that recovery came from 125 of these less-populated counties spread far-and-wide across the country.

In sharp contrast, in the latest recovery from 2010-2014, these same less-populated counties, on average, lost businesses, and in their place 20 large, urban counties accounted for the same 50 percent of overall growth. Essentially, over the last 25 years, high levels

impactful entrepreneurial education to the surrounding area. "Anyone who is seeking to go out on their own has no realization how valuable these concepts are," said Ice House alumnus Pete Walterscheid about the entrepreneurial mindset course he took at ICC. "These concepts are difficult to relate to others, but those of us who have gone through the process would agree that this is an invaluable resource." Now 64-years-old, Pete lived the entrepreneurial life as a former owner of a pharmacy and now is pursuing his passion as a magician.

ICC's Ice House alumna Joanne Smith was looking for opportunities after a 22-year career in a corporate setting. Ice House helped make her aware of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that surrounded her hometown.



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