

For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

Karyn Olsson

Marketing Department, Inc.

karyno@marketingdepartmentinc.com

Phone: (906) 483-2000



ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT CENTER TO OPEN IN HANCOCK ON APRIL 1ST WITH THE GOAL TO START LOCAL BUSINESSES.

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Hancock, MI - After many months of planning and collaboration between MTEC SmartZone, Finlandia University and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the Entrepreneur Support Center (ESC) has become a reality. The ESC is a place where entrepreneurs and small businesses can go to access office space, equipment, training and other start-up resources.

The program offers product and service businesses entrepreneurial training in every aspect, from business planning and research, to finance, marketing and product development. "This center is unique in that it provides entrepreneurs with a short-term office as well as professional guidance to launch the business they are starting," states MTEC SmartZone Program Director, Jonathan Leinonen.

Local business incubators, MTEC SmartZone and Finlandia University have been working closely to create this opportunity for the community. MTEC SmartZone recently obtained a grant from the MEDC to purchase equipment. The grant included funds to outfit a training center with broadband internet, videoconferencing equipment, computer workstations running business software, color printers, a copier, telephones and meeting spaces. Together MTEC SmartZone and Finlandia have been preparing the training center for entrepreneurs to come in.

Currently the facility houses several MTEC SmartZone and Finlandia start-up businesses. Bonnie Holland, the Director of Finlandia University's Jutila Center for Global Design and Business, is excited about the opportunity for the area. She said, "The Entrepreneur Support Center offers entrepreneurs the chance to overcome the day-to-day challenges of launching a business. In addition to equipment and training, both Jonathan and I are also located right in the building for additional help. The combination of these services and resources are expected to launch businesses sooner. Partnership of the two landlords is bringing the entrepreneurship program forward."

Jess Tompkins, a Michigan Tech student, fashion designer and aspiring entrepreneur recently took second place in Michigan Tech's business plan competition. Jess comments, "I'm planning to start a business for women's outdoor apparel. The Entrepreneur Support Center provides a fully operating office space that I couldn't afford otherwise. Within a couple of weeks I will have my partnership set up and be planning my initial product launch."

Another Michigan Tech student, Collin Stoner, recent founder of Selene Photonics and Automation, was one of the first to register at the Entrepreneur Support Center. Collin says, "The support center and the SmartZone have been instrumental in starting my business. As an engineering student with little business experience, their business advisors have filled the gap in my 'business smarts', making my venture possible."

To facilitate the entrepreneurial training component, MTEC SmartZone and Finlandia University are partnering with local business leaders and industry professionals to build a team of consultants to help entrepreneurs start their businesses. Leinonen said, "With assistance from business mentors, most entrepreneurs will be able to complete the start-up steps then

locate into one of the local business incubators to continue growing.” These business professionals provide a range of assistance and training topics including:

- Jacqueline Miaso, Delta Business Solutions - QuickBooks training, book keeping, accounting and taxes
- Matthew Monte, Monte Consulting - guidance in technology marketing, including web development, social media networking and video promotion
- Steph Olsson, Wickley Agency - risk prevention and insurance for emerging businesses
- Roger Woods, Homer Productivity - business plan development and proposal writing
- Karyn Olsson, Marketing Department Inc. - strategic marketing, promotion and branding
- Larry Chopp, independent sales consultant - sales and lead generation
- Kevin Mackey, Attorney at Law - corporate legal responsibilities
- John Deibel, technology licensing manager - patent and intellectual property filings
- Marilyn Clark, Competent Systems LLC - human resource management and operations

Anyone interested in the ESC business startup program, entrepreneurial training, workshops and coaching sessions should apply through Jonathan Leinonen at MTEC SmartZone. Individuals must have a solid idea for a business or be in the early stages of business start-up to be eligible for the program. Depending on the type of business, the program may take 6-9 months to complete. The objective for ESC graduates is to have a running business at the conclusion of the program. The introductory fee for the program is \$100 per entrepreneur and includes use of the Entrepreneur Support Center and the support services. Participants must meet eligibility requirements including working with the program staff to establish and achieve a comprehensive set of business goals for starting their businesses.

The ESC provides tools, methods and information important for business success, including a feasibility study, management team, market research, industry analysis, patents, competitive analysis, financial budgeting and bookkeeping, corporate filings, marketing, advertising collateral and sales. The ultimate goal of the ESC is to create jobs by mentoring emerging businesses through startup and into fully operational, successful enterprises.

More information and ESC applications can be obtained at www.wdcenter.biz or by email info@escenter.biz or call Jonathan Leinonen at (906)487-7004.

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