

Minority employment aim of Paxtons' fund

The Paducah couple's \$1 million endowment aims to help local African- Americans improve their education and employment opportunities.

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Paducahans Fred and Peggy Paxton have established a \$1 million endowment through the Community Foundation of West Kentucky to help local African- Americans improve their education and find gainful employment here.

Civic leaders are seeking at least another \$1 million in matching money from individuals, businesses and organizations to supplement the new McCracken County Community Career Endowment, said Paducah Mayor Bill Paxton.

Fred Paxton, board chairman of Paxton Media Group, owner of The Paducah Sun and WPSD-TV, made the announcement Monday afternoon in the city commission chambers with local government and minority leaders attending.

Fred Paxton, Paducah-McCracken County NAACP Chapter President J.W. Cleary and businessman B.A. Hamilton will make up an advisory committee to determine how interest gained on the money will be spent via grants to colleges, vocational schools and tax-exempt organizations.

“I think this is one of the greatest things that’s happened to the African-American community,” Cleary said. “If it helps the African-American community, it’s also going to help the entire

community.”

African-Americans make up almost a fourth of the Paducah population, but based on the 2000 census the unemployment rate among blacks in McCracken County was about 15 percent, three times that of whites.

Hamilton expressed concern that too many talented young people have left the area without a concerted effort to keep them. Among other things, the new program will work with kids starting no later than middle school, he said.

“The premise that I’m operating on here is that a good job will solve almost any problem that a person or family has,” Paxton said. “But without a good job, everything becomes a challenge.”

The endowment is being formed as a nonprofit corporation that Cleary and others will run with plans to eventually hire a paid director. Paxton challenged people to add to the fund, create their own endowments or contribute to the corporation.

Money will be disbursed from the Community Foundation, which has an office on the sixth floor of the U.S. Bank Building at 4th and Broadway. Vice President Gerry Montgomery, a former Paducah mayor, said people may contact foundation director Tony Watkins at 442-8622 for other details.

The Community Foundation manages funds for charitable organizations and donations for charitable causes. It accepts gifts of almost any kind, invests the funds and distributes the income to nonprofit agencies and programs that match the donor’s interests and goals. Since its start in 1997 with \$300 in seed money, the foundation has grown to 75 funds totaling \$7.3 million, Montgomery said.

Fred Paxton said those involved with the corporation will recruit,

train, groom and motivate job seekers, “and then they’re going to help them connect with employers.” Having formerly built minority recruiting into the performance reviews of Paducah Sun department heads, he challenged local businesses to “take a fresh look” at African-American job applicants.

“We’re not asking them to give any job to an applicant that is not qualified,” he said. “But we also ask that they not stereotype those job applicants.”

Cleary serves on a Paxton endowment development committee with B.A., Frances and Charles Hamilton, as well as Danny Fugate, Fredricka Hargrove, Early Fugate, Cynthia Alston and Carol Young.

Hargrove said the new corporation will host workshops, classes and seminars to help people obtain GEDs or other certifications, improve job skills and “dress for success,” coordinate skills programs with area agencies, and pay for higher education entrance fees and procedures. It will also seek support from the business community and provide mentors, she said.

The program will work with schools to identify problems and issues with minority youth, and hold school workshops, Hargrove said. Other plans are to maintain a database of advertised and “inner-circle” employment opportunities; coordinate and award grants to other area organizations based on performance in obtaining training, job-placement or employment-related services; and study other successful programs.

The Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce will strongly support the endeavor through its Business Education Partnership, said incoming board chairman Barbara Veazey. She is president of West Kentucky Community and Technical College.