

Endowment organizing help for job seekers

A new program financed by the late Fred Paxton secures office space in Paducah.

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In creating a \$1 million endowment aimed primarily at helping minorities find and keep good jobs locally, Fred Paxton knew he was doing something that had never been tried, his son Richard Paxton said.

The retired Sun publisher decided the possible benefit to the entire community was worth any risk.

“I would rather light a candle than curse the darkness,” Richard Paxton said his father wrote in his notes. “And so, I think it is incumbent on all the rest of us to keep the candle burning.”

Richard Paxton said his father had helped the community in ways too numerous to count, but “I do know this was his last great contribution to this community, and I’m glad he got it done in time.”

Organizers and promoters of the McCracken County Community Career Endowment formally launched the program Thursday with a reception at the Cherry Civic Center.

Interim Director Linda Dungey said the program is off to a great start. The Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce and Greater Paducah Economic Development Council have donated office space for the program at the Commerce Center, 401 Kentucky

Ave. The office is now open from noon to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Paperwork has also been completed to give the program its tax-exempt status, and donations are being accepted to add to the fund.

“We want to do a lot of things in this community,” Dungey said. “We need to do a lot of things in this community. And every one of you, plus three or four people you know, could be very beneficial in our efforts.”

Dungey envisions the program helping people in five areas: getting good jobs; keeping good jobs; mentoring and tutoring in schools; developing coalitions among charities and others; and providing direct financial assistance where necessary.

By the end of the year she hopes to have in place a job bank to link those needing jobs with available positions, a network of social service providers and a list of available mentors.

Dungey said she has already gotten a call from a woman with excellent job credentials who asked for help applying for a job listed in a newspaper advertisement. She said she will ask the potential employer to take a special look at the applicant.

The endowment will help fill in the cracks between charities and government assistance programs, she said. For example, “many people we find are able to qualify for a tuition scholarship, but they are unable to go because they are unable to pay for their books or associated fees.”

Other people need help finding care for their children so they can work or go to school or attend training so they can be considered for a promotion, she said. Some people need to learn how to fill out a resume or dress for a job interview. Some are unsure how to be seriously considered for an open position at a company where they know no one. Some employers want help in diversifying their

companies, she said.

She urged people interested in participating to list employment opportunities with the endowment, join the advisory board, sign up to mentor or conduct a job skills workshop or make a financial contribution.

B.A. Hamilton, who sits on the endowment's board of advisors, said he especially likes provisions in the program to get young people prepared for careers early through tutoring, mentoring and job shadowing.

"We've got these young people who are getting in trouble, not finishing school," he said. "They don't have a job. If we can reach these young people now and help them get an education and get a good job, maybe we can help them before they get in trouble."

Hamilton thinks the program has the potential to convey a message of hope.

"They don't see a future," he said. "If we could just give them a little hope, I think we could make such a difference."

J.W. Cleary, president of the endowment's board of directors as well as the Paducah-McCracken County NAACP, urged people to look at participation as an investment. "Whatever you put into this program, it will be an investment in your kids, your grandkids and this community down the road."

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