

Berrien, Cass, Van Buren set sights on new business

<http://www.nilesstar.com/2011/03/20/berrien-cass-van-buren-set-sights-on-new-business/>

March 25, 2011

Published 3:50pm Sunday, March 20, 2011

Members of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), along with a number of other area organizations, are looking for a few good business plans.

The SWMPC along with the Edward Lowe Foundation, Berrien County Community Development, Cass and Van Buren County Economic Development Corporation have launched their first Venture Quest Business Plan Competition.

The competition is aimed at new businesses either hoping to get a new idea off the ground or expand their still relatively young operation, according to Matthew Aslesen, associate planner with the SWMPC.

“The idea of Venture Quest is we are trying to target either new businesses, people with new business ideas, that would be open to locating in Berrien, Cass (or) Van Buren counties,” he said. “Or existing businesses that are less than three years old and are not large in scale, to get capital to increase business and size.”

Those interested in participating in the competition must turn in an intent to compete by April 1.

The competition is centered on the business plan, due April 15.

“They’re going to be solely judged on that business plan,” Aslesen said. “So that is the most important part.”

Those participating in the contest have a chance to win cash prizes that could help in their investment in new business and growth. The amount won will be based on the total amount of sponsorship funds raised. Aslesen said fund raising will continue throughout the next month and prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place.

According to competition rules, those eligible to compete include startups not yet operational or emerging businesses. Businesses already up and running must be located in one of the three participating counties. Those hoping to get their business off the ground must be committed to doing so in southwest Michigan.

“We’re serious in this region about encouraging new business,” Aslesen said. That includes, he added, investing in the idea of “reinventing ourselves.”

Aslesen said participants should be especially enthusiastic about the southwest Michigan area.

“The most targeted (participant would be) people who are in the region and just looking for that boost,” he said. “That being said, we do have an application from India.”

Aslesen also said participants will have a chance to have their business plans seen and heard by professionals throughout the southwest Michigan area at the competition’s awards ceremony.

Finalists will be announced May 15 and an awards ceremony will be held Tuesday, May 24 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Details about the competition, including eligibility and a business plan checklist can be found at www.swmpc.org or www.vbco.org/venturequest.asp.