Homegrown Initiative

Revitalizing Mercer County: Retaining Our Talented Young Minds

Since the exodus of the steel industry, Mercer County has delt with a consistent, annual population decline. With a substantial "brain drain" comes a decreasing talent pool, shrinking customer base, and a decreasing interest in out-of-state businesses relocating to Mercer County. Most importantly, however, we are losing our well-educated, hardworking children and grandchildren to far away communities in search of 'greener pastures.'

With repopulation in mind, Penn-Northwest Development Corporation launched the Homegrown Initiative to connect K-12 students and young adults, regardless of educational interests, to opportunities within Mercer County. Guided by a board of local young professionals deemed, the Future Leaders, the Homegrown Initiative strives to attract and retain talent by focusing on improving the economic quadrants of live, learn, work, and play.

With a primary goal of educating students on career opportunities within Mercer County, the Homegrown Initiative launched a series focused on bringing businesses into high schools to hear from local industry champions. Each month, hundreds of students hear success stories from young professionals and the journey they took to find their career. The goal is that each year, thousands of students hear from a minimum of 10 leading industries and over 50 local career paths, regardless of the secondary education they choose to pursue.

With financial constraints being a key barrier to educational systems participating in career awareness programming, the Homegrown Initiative sought additional funds to remove this barrier. Through the $600,000 raised through the support of the Department of Community and Economic Development, Representative Wentling and Senator Brooks, the Homegrown Initiative covers the expenses for all schools to participate in whatever they choose. Included in these expenses, the Initiative has earmarked $40,000 to support sending hundreds of 5th and 6th grade students to Junior Achievement's BizTown. The Initiative has also set aside $10,000 to cover transportation costs for all awareness events, including the annual Builder's Association Trade Expo at the Canfield Fair. Over 500 Mercer County students participate annually, introducing 9-12 grade students to a variety of skilled trade jobs.

While connecting students with strong, family-sustaining careers is critical to retaining our talent, it's also essential to build a sense of community. The Future Leaders host a variety of networking and professional development events tailored specifically for young adults. From career coaching seminars and entrepreneur brunches to networking nights and happy hours, each event is tailored to engage and connect the next generation with much needed resources.

Young adults are the lifeblood of our community's future, embodying the energy, creativity, and innovation necessary for progress. By investing in our youth and providing them with opportunities to grow, learn, and contribute locally, we lay the foundation for a thriving, dynamic, and sustainable community. When young adults find meaningful work and engagement here, they not only enhance their skills but also bring fresh perspectives that drive economic growth and social cohesion.

For those interested in learning more or getting engaged in building a viable future for young adults in Mercer County, please contact Jake Rickert at Penn-Northwest Development Corporation or check our website at www.homegrownmc.com.