



Community Foundation NW Miss. Regional Forum

Posted: March 17, 2011

Author: Press Release

Press Release: 3/14/2011

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Northwest Mississippi Regional Forum: Technology-driven Development in Northwest Mississippi

Technology-driven companies that have recently announced new or upgraded locations in Northwest Mississippi will be spotlighted at a regional forum, set for Wednesday, March 30 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Tunica Gold Strike Casino Resort. The CEO of one of these Silicon Valley-based companies will describe how his company chose this region after reviewing sites in eight states.

Morning panel sessions will focus on four high-tech educational programs that are free to schools in Northwest Mississippi as well as the region's growing tourism footprint. The forum also will include the Mississippi Economic Council's Blueprint Mississippi Road Show, where participants will use high-tech electronic voting to focus on key issues for the state and the region.

There is no charge for attendance – including lunch -- thanks to the sponsorship of Gold Strike Casino Resort and Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi for the MEC Road Show, but pre-registration is required at www.mec.ms.

"Good things are happening in our region, and we wanted to let more people know about them," said Tom Pittman, president of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi which is hosting the forum. "At the same time, we want to see how we can expand on these trends to build a better region. Everyone attending will have the opportunity to vote on the priorities for our region and the state."

Dr. Rao Mulpuri, CEO of Soladigm, a Silicon Valley-based company opening its first manufacturing plant in Olive Branch to produce energy-efficient Dynamic Glass for buildings, is the luncheon's keynote speaker. He will explain why his company chose to locate manufacturing in Northwest Mississippi after considering sites in eight states. GE recently selected Soladigm as a strategic partner and winner of its Ecomagination Challenge, a contest designed to jump-start transformative technologies to enable the smart grid on a massive scale.

Janet Longmore, the founder and CEO of Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT), an international social enterprise with headquarters in Canada, will be the morning highlighter. Her presentation at the start of the day will show how programs that link technology, education and entrepreneurship are contributing to workforce development and economic opportunity for youth and the communities they live in.

She will draw from DOT's innovative work, creating young leaders of change, in the 11 countries in Africa, the Middle East, China, Mexico and America where DOT has local offices. Locally, DOT USA has placed a full-time technology intern in each of 59 Northwest Mississippi schools (and over 300 schools throughout Mississippi and Louisiana) to help teachers and students use 21st century technology to accelerate learning and preparation for today's high-tech world of work. DOT's impact is gaining attention: Janet was named one of Canada's Top 100 Women of Power and Influence for 2010 and Canada's leading news magazine notes that "DOT is creating a path to self-sufficiency that's attracting attention – and serious money – from donors looking for alternatives to old-style development assistance."

Dr. Hank Bounds, Mississippi Commissioner of Higher Education will focus midmorning on Blueprint Mississippi, a strategic initiative sponsored by the Mississippi Economic Council, Momentum Mississippi and the Mississippi Partnership for Economic Development, aimed at putting Mississippi in the position of greatest opportunity. Participants will learn about the impact on the state of four foundational and four cross

cutting issue areas — and will have a chance to use an electronic voting process to offer opinions on key issues.

The Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi is co-hosting the Regional Forum event with the Mississippi Economic Council. Seven countywide economic development organizations in Northwest Mississippi are cosponsoring the regional forum along with Chambers of Commerce in the region. Two morning panel sessions will focus on *How Technology Opens Our Classrooms to the World* and *The Authentic Mississippi Experience in Cultural Tourism*. Included will be: Michael Cormack, a Teach For America alumnus who is now the principal of Quitman County Elementary School; Webster Franklin, CEO of the Tunica Convention & Visitors Bureau that was selected in 2009 as the best in the Southeast; Roger Stolle, a former St. Louis business executive who now runs "one of the 17 coolest record stores in America" in Clarksdale; and Bill Abel, named the 2006 Blues Musician of the Year by the Mississippi Delta Blues Society.

The Delta Business Journal is sponsoring the event along with the Mississippi-owned weekly newspapers the Press Register of Clarksdale, DeSotoTimes-Tribune, The Panolian, the South Reporter of Marshall County, Sun-Sentinel of Tallahatchie County, The Democrat of Tate County, and the Tunica Times.

Other sponsors are the Clarksdale-Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce & Industrial Foundation, DeSoto County Economic Development Council, Marshall County Industrial Development Authority, Panola Partnership, Quitman County Development Organization, Tate County Economic Development Foundation, Tunica Mississippi Chamber & Economic Development Foundation and the Horn Lake, Southaven, Olive Branch and Hernando Main Street Chambers of Commerce.

Additional information and registration at the Mississippi Economic Council website:
www.mec.ms

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