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Community Foundation hosts economic forum

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The Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi is hosting a Northwest Mississippi Forum focused on technology-driven economic development in light of the recent investments by high-tech companies.

"There are so many good things going on and we want to spotlight those and at the same time we're going to look at some of the factors, like education, that underlie those good investments," said Tom Pittman, director of the Community Foundation.

"We'll also look to the future at things like tourism, another good source of economic development."

Rao Mulpuri, CEO of Soladigm, will be the keynote speaker for the Northwest Mississippi Forum, talking about why his company chose Northwest Mississippi.

Soladigm develops green building solutions designed to improve energy efficiency. The company's dynamic glass switches from clear to tinted on demand, resulting in significant cost savings.

"The great thing about Soladigm is, energy efficiency is something everyone understands," said Erich Klawuhn, vice president of business development for Soladigm. "It's smart when you think about it. In order to make a product, it needs to be in a high volume production environment where people are thinking about quality and distribution. We know how to do technology development but we're doing the manufacturing process through people who have been in manufacturing for years. We've seen a great awareness in that are from DeSoto County folks, all the way to the governor. It's perfect."

Klawuhn also mentioned the connection of the rapidly expanding school system as a benefit to the workforce and the product Soladigm is manufacturing.

"The dynamic glass we're making has shown to increase productivity in students," Klawuhn said. "The schools district averages a new school every year. Wouldn't it be great if the glass was integrated into a new school every year."

The event will be a showcase for these high-tech companies who have chosen this area to do business: Twin Creeks solar panels in Tate County, Schultz Pipe in Tunica County, GE Aviation in Panola County and Asics in Marshall county.

Also attending the forum will be representatives from the Community Foundations education website, WatchKnow.org, representatives from EverFi, an online financial literacy platform, representatives from Mississippi Financial Scholars program, encouraging business people's interaction with middle school students and Janet Longmore, head of the Digital Opportunity Trust, which has placed technology interns in 59 Northwest Mississippi Schools.

Hank Bounds, director of Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, will speak as part of the Mississippi Economic Council's Blueprint for Mississippi.

Everyone will have an opportunity to vote on top priorities for future development throughout the region and state as a part of Blueprint for Mississippi.

"I think we'll all learn some of the things that are happening and contributing to the better quality of life in the region," Pittman said.

Technology-driven manufacturing is an area in which North Mississippi has experienced tremendous growth in the past few years.

"We have jumped into it pretty quickly with the announcements and expansions of several companies in the Northwest Mississippi area," said Jim Flanagan, president and CEO of the DeSoto County Economic Development Council. "These projects have generated a lot of buzz not only in the area for higher technical skills but some real interest from outside the area from a marketing perspective as Northwest Mississippi continues to elevate its workforce opportunities."

The forum is at Gold Strike Casino Resort in Tunica March 30, starting at 9 a.m. and lasting until 2 p.m.

The event is free and will include breakfast and lunch.

Anyone can register by clicking on the Blueprint for Mississippi Road Show at msmec.org.

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