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SIFE Team Ready to Assist Small and Micro Businesses in Yates County

KEUKA PARK, N.Y.—The Keuka College Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) team has put out its shingle again.

The team, whose 2003-04 academic year community outreach projects gained national recognition, is taking a leading role in Finger Lakes Access to Business Capital (FL/ABC), a pilot project that will provide critical resources to small and micro businesses in Yates County.



“We have one client and our students are anxious to sign up more,” said Neil Siebenhar, assistant professor of management and SIFE team adviser.

U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) came to campus in September to launch FL/ABC, which she said “harnesses the energy, the years of experience, the breadth and reach of all these different organizations for the purpose of giving more small and micro businesses in Yates County—and throughout the Finger Lakes—a chance to succeed.”

Joining the Keuka College SIFE team as business advisers are Count Me In, a New York City-based national women’s non-profit organization dedicated to helping women achieve economic independence; Rural Opportunities Inc., a community development and human services organization dedicated to assisting farm workers, low-income families and economically depressed communities throughout New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, and Puerto Rico; Yates County Industrial Development Agency (IDA); Worker Ownership Resource Center (WORC), which serves Yates, Ontario, Wayne, Seneca, Cayuga, Chenango, Steuben, Schuyler, and Chemung counties; and the Small Business Development Center at Finger Lakes Community College.

Lenders include Count Me In and Rural Opportunities Inc., who have teamed up to create an additional \$100,000 loan pool devoted to FL/ABC needs in Yates County; Yates County IDA; and WORC.

“Each of the agencies and institutions in the network offer valuable business advisory services and/or funding that are in some ways unique but also have some degree of overlap,” said Siebenhar.

In addition to helping clients develop business, marketing, and production plans, as well as other

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business needs, Keuka College SIFE students will coordinate efforts between members of the network.

“When appropriate, our students will serve as gatekeepers for new micro and small business clients requesting lending and/or services from the network,” explained Siebenhar.

However, clients may enter this network via any of the agencies or institutions, according to Siebenhar.

“Some clients may already have developed business plans and are looking for funding. Some may have funding but need business advice. And still others may be starting from scratch. Regardless, they will be routed to the resources they need,” he said.

The FLABC program is designed to give small businesses and entrepreneurs, including those often considered “unbankable,” the financing and training they need to develop new enterprises or enhance existing ones.

And help is needed. New York state ranked 45th among the 50 states and District of Columbia in the 2004 Small Business Survival Index, a ranking of the policy environment for entrepreneurship across the country.

“Small businesses and micro businesses (a business with five or fewer employees) are the lifeblood of this state’s economy,” said Siebenhar. “Micro businesses employ 19 percent of New York state workers and in Yates County its 28 percent.”

SIFE is active on more than 1,600 college campuses in the U.S. and 40 other countries. The non-profit organization works in partnership with businesses and other institutions to promote free enterprise principles by encouraging students to take what they are learning in the classroom and apply it to real-life situations, and to use their knowledge to better their communities through educational outreach projects.

The Keuka College SIFE team cracked the Top 20 at the 2004 SIFE USA National Exposition in May in Kansas City, Mo. The competition brought together 140 regional winners from four-year colleges and universities. The 140 teams were split into 20, seven-team leagues. Keuka won its league, advancing to the semifinal round for the first time.

In Kansas City, teams presented multi-media presentations that showed the range of educational outreach projects they completed during the 2003-04 academic year. The Keuka team presented the fund-raiser it held March 13 to benefit Mercy Flight Central Inc. and the Global Economy Fair held March 5 for fourth and fifth graders at Middlesex Valley Elementary School in Rushville, among others.

“I am impressed with Keuka’s SIFE program because it understands the need for community service as well as free enterprise,” said Clinton.

“As the national leader in experiential, hands-on learning, Keuka College is committed to these

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kinds of programs that not only provide our students with real-world education opportunities but allow them to make a positive difference in the community,” said Keuka College President Joseph G. Burke. “Experiential education and community service are hallmarks of a Keuka College education.”

According to Siebenhar, the pilot program “will be targeted at Yates County and, with success, will expand to include the Finger Lakes region.”

For more information of the FLABC, contact Siebenhar at (315) 279-5428.