

FIREFIGHTERS back to aid struggling small businesses

There's still time to involve your business in our 4th Annual Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin initiative

Are you a business owner struggling to make decisions to keep your company afloat?

Do you feel as if you're always putting out fires in your business as opposed to focusing your attention and resources on helping your company grow?

There's no shame in admitting it. Nearly all of us have been there at one point in the evolution of our business. The good news is that B2B can help, and this opportunity could be just the catalyst to help turn your business around.

For the past four years, B2B has been proud to present its Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin initiative, a program in which voluntary business owners in search of solutions to help put out the fires and improve their operations partner with some of the leading business consultants in northeast Wisconsin at no cost. In exchange, these business owners share with B2B readers what lessons they've learned and how they've implemented those lessons into improving their operations.

All of this sharing means a substantial amount of no-cost publicity for your company during the next six months, an added value to the already worthwhile benefit of free business consulting to turn one's business around.

B2B's veteran firefighter emeritus Gary Vaughan of Appleton-based Guident Business Solutions has helped three Fox Valley businesses improve their standing during the past three years of B2B's Firefighter's initiative, helping one to streamline its operations and two others to reverse their fortunes from previously downward trending profit and loss statements. He's anxious to be back this year to help lead our effort to extinguish the fires area small business owners spend so much time putting out each day.

We're in the final stretch of soliciting nominations for interested business owners to participate in this year's Firefighters initiative, which will begin with our April issue. If you're interested in involving your own business in our Firefighters initiative for this coming year – or perhaps know of a business owner who would benefit from such assistance – please drop me an email at sean@newnorthb2b.com at your earliest convenience. Briefly explain what challenges your business is facing and why you'd like to be involved with one of our esteemed business firefighters.

I'll only accept nominations up until Friday, March 14, so please act quickly if you're interested in possibly participating this coming year.

Gary Vaughan of Guident Business Solutions in Appleton has been a consultant since the beginning of B2B's FIREFIGHTERS OF NORTHEAST WISCONSIN initiative.



The concept of pooling resources to overcome an obstacle for the betterment of a community sounds simple, but often it's easier said than done.

Political and philosophical clashing can hinder forward motion though eventually, differences are set aside and the collaborative spirit takes over.

This way of thinking and the know-how to get it done are traits shared by University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Chancellor Thomas Harden and University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells, who both recently announced retirements and plans to step down by the end of August.

Harden and Wells say their accomplishments were only possible with the help of others. Both men have been hailed for their efforts to grow enrollment at their respective colleges and establish stronger relations between the universities and communities around the region.

"I think there always will be many things to do and there always will be opportunities to improve and expand the impact the universities make in a positive way," Harden said.

Wells said a strong collaborative foundation has been established for new leaders to build upon.

"Change brings about new opportunities," he said. "What we hope we've done, to use an athletic metaphor, we built a program of enduring shared values of how we do things, collaboration, diversity and respect."

More engineering graduates

Three new four-year engineering degrees, which can be earned either through UW Green Bay or UW Oshkosh, are now available for students from across northeast Wisconsin to pursue.

Richard Wells



Position: Chancellor, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Appointed: 2000 (retiring August 2014)

Career highlights: provost and vice president of academic affairs, Indiana State University; dean of college of arts and sciences, West Chester University, Pennsylvania; chair, department of sociology and anthropology at University of South Alabama

Unique about this effort is students who choose to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering or environmental engineering, can begin their academic journey at either the College of the Menominee Nation, Fox Valley Technical College, Lakeshore Technical College, Moraine Park Technical College, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, UW Fond du Lac, UW Fox Valley, UW Manitowoc, UW

Marinette or UW Sheboygan and complete it at UW Oshkosh or UW Green Bay.

It's not just a simple transfer of credits, a common practice for years, college officials say. Students have the flexibility to tap the resources of the participating colleges, so if an engineering student from NWTC needs access to the industrial labs and equipment at FVTC for a project, the doors will be open to them.

Overtime, these partnerships can save money by eliminating duplicate investment in infrastructure and help students achieve education goals faster. The initiative emerged through the Northeast Wisconsin Educational Resource Alliance, which Wells helped launch and currently is chaired by Harden.

Susan May, FVTC president, said getting the colleges to work together initially through the alliance was an important first step.

"(Chancellor) Wells was among the first leaders to bring our institutions to the table to start working together," May said. "He saw so much potential and now the alliance has existed for more than 10 years."

One of the alliance's first collaborative efforts created a library resource sharing system, which allowed students from the participating colleges to borrow books from other campus libraries using one library card.

Jeff Rafn, NWTC president, praised Wells for his forward thinking, adding the leadership roles which will be vacated by Wells and Harden, will "be big shoes to fill."

"The technical colleges for instance, today have strong relations with UWGB and UWO," he said. "I think those gentlemen recognized the importance of working together as a region."

Rafn said getting the region to see how higher education can be an economic force can be credited to Wells and Harden.

"By focusing on economic development, we have been able to bring these new engineering degree programs to the region," Rafn said. "Northeast Wisconsin is so rich in manufacturing, but we didn't have any kind of engineering programs."

Rafn said the engineering programs would not have happened if it weren't for the partnerships established through the alliance.

The benefits seen with the education alliance provided one of the catalysts for what became The New North Inc., an 18-county regional economic development organization based in De Pere.

Thomas Harden



Position: Chancellor, University of Wisconsin Green Bay

Appointed: 2009 (retiring August 2014)

Career highlights: president, Clayton State University, Georgia; dean, college of technology, Eastern Michigan University; chair, department of technology at Northern Kentucky University