

GETTING STUDENTS 'DRESSED FOR SUCCESS'

MSSU and YPN partner on program to provide professional clothes to students entering workforce

*By Christine Smith
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Job interviews are stressful situations, especially for college students venturing into the professional world for the first time. When facing a potential employer with sweaty palms and butterflies in the stomach, the last thing a student wants to wonder is whether their outfit is appropriate.

That's the line of reasoning behind a program at Missouri Southern State University called Dress for Success. A partnership between MSSU and the Building Future Leaders workgroup of the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce's Young Professionals Network, Dress for Success was launched last year as a professional clothing resource for students entering the job force.

"(It's) a way to pay it forward to college students to help them gain the clothing needed to help them be successful in the job market," said Nicole Brown, director of Career Services at MSSU and co-chair of the Building Future Leaders workgroup.

Through the Dress for Success program, community members are invited to donate new and gently-used professional clothing at the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce. The clothing will be brought to MSSU where students will have the chance to "shop" for several outfits on the clothing giveaway day, held on March 31 at MSSU's Billingsly Student Center.

"College students just don't have professional clothing sitting around in their closets," Brown said.

"Most of us business professionals probably have some extra professional clothing sitting around that if we knew that it could go directly into students' hands, we would gladly pass it on."

Job interviews aren't the only situations for which college students need professional attire, Brown said.

"They're actually a lot of scenarios that are kind of big stressors for students, whether it's going to a networking dinner or receiving an award," Brown said. "(In) those opportunities to interact with business professionals, we want them to have access, and we want them to have clothing sitting in their closet to help them be successful at that."

Last year, Dress for Success collected around 3,000 items which helped 185 students build their professional wardrobes. This year Brown anticipates that the number will be closer to 300 to 400 students.

In order to build up the clothing supply, Dress for Success organizers are focusing on marketing the program to the public in order to generate clothing donations from community members.

Leftover clothing from last year's event was donated to Crosslines Ministries, a non-profit organization that provides clothing and other items to people in the Joplin area. This year's overflow will also be donated.

"We want to make sure that we are getting it directly into students' hands, and whatever we aren't able to use, we are sending it out to the community and getting it in someone's hands," Brown said.



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The Dress for Success display at the Joplin Area of Chamber of Commerce, where business and community members have begun donating professional clothes for MSSU students.

See SUCCESS, page 21

A PIECE OF THE BIGGER PIE

Beecher: Potential Empire sale would bring efficacy of scale to regional utility

*By David Mink
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CEOs are busy people, but for Empire District Electric Co. head Brad Beecher, the last few months have been a marathon.

In October the Empire board of directors decided to explore and determine the value of the company. Just two months later – Beecher remembers the Dec. 10 date vividly – the news broke, and rumors of the company's impending sale started spreading among employees and the community.

In February Canada-based Algonquin Power & Utilities Corp. announced that it had signed a letter of intent to purchase Empire in a \$2.4 billion deal. The announcement set off a flurry of activity, and Beecher and other key executives spent the next two weeks visiting Empire properties around the Midwest – joining a team from Algonquin which included its CEO, Ian Robertson – to address employees and assuage their concerns.

Although those efforts have ended, the activity for Beecher and other executives with the two companies is only beginning. The sale is by no means final, and teams from both companies – along with teams from state and national regulating agencies – will likely work for the next 12-18 months before the sale can be approved and finalized, according to Beecher.

The first step in that process is approval by Empire shareholders, who in the next 60-90 days will receive

disclosures from Empire detailing the interest the company generated from possible buyers and will be asked to approve the Algonquin purchase – at \$34 per share, which is a 21 percent premium to the closing share price on Feb. 8, when the purchase was announced.

Once they receive a quorum of votes – 50.1 percent of the 43.5 million outstanding shares, or about 21.9 million votes – the decision is up to the shareholders.

Provided the decision is approved, Empire and Algonquin will begin the process of seeking regulatory approval. The two companies will work with commissions in four states – Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Arkansas – to ensure the deal meets with regulatory requirements and customer interest.

"The challenge is trying to do four of these at once," Beecher said in an interview with JRBj. "But we have a lot of experience working with four separate commissions. It just takes time; it's a matter of getting that many parties lined up."

Beecher said Algonquin's nature as a foreign company shouldn't cause any stumbling blocks for the deal.

"Algonquin already owns utilities in Missouri and Arkansas," he said. "Since they're Canadian as opposed to (European), federal approval should be a formality in my estimation. They have 55,000 natural gas customers in Missouri already, so the Missouri commission and staff already know who they are. They already serve Butler, and they already own the water company in Noel."

In total Algonquin has around 560,000 customers

across its regulated utility business. Those customers are split between three company subsidiaries; Liberty East, Liberty West and Liberty Central. Empire will fall under the Central arm, and including Empire's current 218,000 customers, Liberty Central will serve around 340,000.

That brings an efficacy of scale to Empire's business, Beecher said – something that it didn't have as a locally-owned company.

"When we have more customers we have a greater ability to spread costs," he said. "When we get ready to change our customer information system, instead of spreading the \$30 million cost over 218,000 customers, we're going to spread it over 340,000 customers, and maybe even 780,000 customers."

"It really is about scale, and that's what makes sense for our customers over the long term. They'll get the benefit of local management yet still get the efficacy of scale. They'll get the local bill with hopefully lower costs in the end."

Also underneath Liberty Central will be the company's existing other water and electric properties in Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Arkansas and Texas – representing about 60,000 customers. And because part of the sale includes the relocation of Liberty Central's headquarters to the Empire headquarters in Joplin, Beecher's activity isn't likely to slow down.

"I'll probably carry two business cards," Beecher said. "One that says CEO/president of Liberty Central, and one that says CEO/president of Empire."

SUCCESS: Program starts students out with professional clothing for interviews, ceremonies

Continued from page 8

Items needed are dress pants, tops, blazers and shoes. In addition, ties and briefcases are needed for men; cardigans, dresses and skirts are needed for women. The items must be clean and in good condition.

“The biggest challenge is reminding people that these need to be outfits that you would probably wear to an interview yourself,” Brown said.

The goal is for each student to find three outfits on the March 31 shopping day, which they will be able to keep as a foundation for their professional wardrobe.

“The theory behind that is that you can mix and match the first couple of weeks until you get a paycheck, and then you can start adding items to the staples and build from that,” Brown said.

All clothing sizes are needed, from petite to extra large.

“We’ve had community members make the comment of, ‘I have suits but they are great big,’” said Brown. “I always remind them that we do have football players, we do have students that need big suits, and those are pretty expensive when you go to buy them.”

In addition to clothing donations, Dress for Success organizers are seeking around 40 community members to volunteer on shopping day. Some volunteers will serve as professional shoppers, going one-on-one to work with students to select appropriate outfits and to offer advice on how to put ensembles together.

“It’s someone kind of taking them under their wing and saying, ‘This is how this should fit, this is what you should be looking for,’” Brown said. “Once they have that, they can use it as a model for future outfit-building for their professional wardrobe.”

Volunteers are also needed for more than just shopping. With so many students trying on multiple outfits, help is needed

in the dressing room to re-hang items.

“We’ve had some community members say, ‘I don’t consider myself a fashion

expert; I can’t tell a student what to wear,’”

Brown said. “We say, ‘Well, you can work a hanger.’”

Clothing donations are being accepted now through March 10 during regular business hours at the Chamber offices.



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Anointed Worship

Conference Schedule

Friday March 4th:

- 6p Doors Open
- 6p-7p Registration
- 6p-7p Coloring Party
- 6:30p Kids Check In Opens (Child Care for Kids 0-5th grade)
- 7p Worship Service
- After Service Chocolate Frenzy

Saturday March 5th:

- 9:30a Doors Open
- 9:30a Registration (for those not in attendance Friday)
- 9:30a Kids Check In Opens (Child Care for Kids 0-5th grade)
- 10a 1st Session
- 11:30a Tea Party Luncheon
- 12:30p 2nd Session

REGISTRATION IS FREE

Register online today at
www.jfwc.org/LadiesCon16

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