

Initiative gives Morgan State students scholarship money, career counseling

By Josh Kowalkowski
Examiner Staff Writer

A new initiative will provide not only scholarships for low-income students and those who are the first in their families to attend college, but specialized mentoring and a head start on finding a successful career.

"We wanted to find a way to address the barriers to education and career success that traditionally affect these underrepresented students," said Marlene Ibsen, vice president of community relations with Travelers Cos. Inc., which is partnering with Morgan State University in Baltimore City to expand the insurance company's Educational Access Initiative to the Baltimore region.

"It's really a complete, holistic approach. We really feel we can have a positive impact and reach a broader array of youth."

In the first wave, four-year scholarships are being given to three Morgan State freshmen who will be studying math and natural sciences.

Two more scholarships will be offered in the spring, with more scholarships expected in future years, said Ibsen.

"Traditionally, we don't get a lot of minorities or students from disadvantaged backgrounds getting into these careers," said Joseph Whittaker, dean of the School of Computer, Mathematical and Natural Sciences at Morgan State.

"It's not that they're not talented, it's just that they don't usually have the support."

The program will also connect students with mentors through



ARIENNE STARNES/EXAMINER

A partnership between Travelers Cos. Inc. and Morgan State University is providing scholarships and mentoring opportunities for low-income students and those who are the first in their families to attend college.

Travelers and help them secure internships with the goal of helping them transition into the work force.

"We're also asking colleges to provide academic counselors of their own," Ibsen said.

The amounts of the individual scholarships are not being released, but students must continue in their selected majors and maintain a 3.0 grade point average to receive the full benefits, she said.

Freshman Tiara Colbert, 18, of the Fort Meade area and a scholarship recipient, is majoring in math with a concentration in actuarial science.

"I've met a lot of different people, and I'll have a lot of different

opportunities available after I leave," she said.

"It's definitely where I should be now."

The Educational Access Initiative, launched in Minnesota and Connecticut in 2007, this year will provide \$2.5 million in support in all of the states.

CollegeBound Foundation, a Baltimore City-based nonprofit that helps students receive post-secondary education, is also partnering with Travelers by offering students assistance.

Travelers is a St. Paul, Minn.-based auto, home and business insurer that funds charitable organizations.

jkowalkowski@baltimoreexaminer.com

Ignite event fires up Baltimore entrepreneurs

By Jason Policastro
Examiner Correspondent

The rules of the entrepreneurship game have changed, and many in Baltimore are taking advantage.

The old barriers to starting a business — office space, a full staff, a physical presence in your market — are no longer applicable. Now anyone with a great idea, an Internet connection and a little bit of creativity can start his own business.

In that spirit, the Ignite Baltimore event at the Windup Space on North Avenue in Station North last week brought together an eclectic mix of Baltimore serial entrepreneurs, tech gurus and other creative-minded individuals for a night of idea-sharing and collaboration.

The premise? Give a group of thought leaders in Baltimore five minutes apiece onstage to offer their thoughts on issues or problems, tips on starting their own businesses, or advice on new ways to work together.

Attendees from diverse business backgrounds came together Thursday evening to find common ground. Among the presenters were new media executives, writers, even a minister.

Clarence Wooten is the founder of

CollectiveX, a Columbia Web startup that helps people from a wide range of groups within companies, communities and families communicate more easily. Wooten is a veteran entrepreneur who has been starting companies since his days as an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins. His presentation at Ignite was entitled "12 Hard-Won Lessons of Entrepreneurship."

"This is a tech-focused crowd," Wooten said, shortly before delivering his presentation. "But it's also an artsy crowd. It's almost a combination. It's refreshing to see."

Mayor Sheila Dixon's Red Line coordinator, Danyell Diggs, gave the crowd a comprehensive update on the status of the proposed plan for the Red Line, the east-west rail line that is still working its way through approval in city government. Diggs' presentation was received warmly by the nearly standing-room-only crowd.

"It's time for Baltimore to have connection," Diggs explained over scattered cheers. "And it's not just about transportation. There are job opportunities, transit-oriented development, as well as keeping that same historic look and feel."

Bryan Young was among the attendees at the evening's event. He operates Intertwine, a business

software company out of the Emerging Technologies Center on Boston Street in Canton.

"A lot of us in Baltimore that have a lot of great ideas get put into niches," Young said. "It's great to have a lot of people from different fields get together and share their ideas. It's been very interesting. I didn't know what to expect."

Young is planning on speaking at the next Ignite event in February.

Ignite Baltimore's coordinator is Mike Subelsky, and not surprisingly, his background is as varied as the night's lineup of speakers. He is co-founder and lead developer for an Internet startup based on open source technology, and founded the Baltimore Improv Group and its namesake festival.

"Baltimore is a do-it-yourself kind of town," Subelsky said during intermission. "That why people want to move here, and it's a big advantage that we have. If you want to have an event like this, no one's going to stop you. There are a lot of 'embracers' here. It's been great."

The series of Ignite events has been making the rounds at major cities and creative hubs around the country, including Phoenix, New York and Seattle. The next Ignite Baltimore event is scheduled for Feb. 5, 2009.

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