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NORTHWEST ILLINOIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANNOUNCES ITS 2026 “BUILD IT GROW IT” ENTREPRENEURIAL PROGRAM

HANOVER, ILLINOIS - Northwest Illinois Economic Development (NWILED) has announced their session line up for their 2026 BUILD IT GROW IT (BIGI) program, an entrepreneurial boot camp designed to empower aspiring business owners and entrepreneurs throughout Jo Daviess and Carroll counties and beyond. Now in its third year, the annual program offers a series of concentrated and accelerated seminars that help equip entrepreneurs with knowledge and skills to kick start their businesses, while also offering something new and substantial to more established business owners. The program is open to small business owners, managers, entrepreneurs and even high school and college aged students.

This year's program features participants the opportunity to attend four evening sessions starting Wednesday, January 14 and concluding Thursday, February 12 with a graduation and “Shark Tank” competition. Cost for all four sessions and the grand finale evening is \$50 per person. The sessions are held in different locations in both Jo Daviess and Carroll counties from 5-7 p.m. Each session encourages active participation, networking and the development of practical real-world skills among the attendees.

The following sessions, presenters and locations are:

- **Session 1**
Entrepreneurialism with Aaron Apt of Abt Enterprises and **Succession Planning** with Patrick Powaser of Gradient Coaching and Consulting.
Wednesday, January 14 at Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa in the Galena Territory - Ballroom.
- **Session 2**
Financial Literacy for Small Businesses with Citizens State Bank, Schoenhaar Accounting and the Small Business Development Center.
Thursday, January 22 at the DeSoto House Hotel in Galena - Ballroom.
- **Session 3**
Small Business Marketing and Branding with Basket Case, Visit Galena and Visit NW Illinois.
Thursday, January 29 at Timber Lake Playhouse in rural Mount Carroll.
- **Session 4**
Artificial Intelligence for Small Business with University of Illinois, SoundSafe.ai and Dry Creek Beekeeping.

Thursday, February 5 at the Davis Community Center in Mount Carroll.

The event concludes on Thursday, Feb. 12 with a graduation ceremony and a special “Shark Tank” competition where program graduates who have attended each session will have the opportunity to “WIN” monetary prizes by pitching their ideas and business needs to a panel of select NWILED stakeholders.

The 2026 program is a collaboration of the following sponsors such as NWILED members, JCE Co-op, Jo Daviess County, Illinois, Adkins Energy, Baranski Hammer Moretta & Sheehy, Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa, First Community Bank of Galena and Louie’s Trenching Services, Inc. Other business sponsors include Abt Enterprises, Basket Case, Citizens State Bank, Dry Creek Beekeeping, Gradient Coaching & Counseling, University of Illinois, Schoenhaar Accounting, Small Business Development Center, SoundSafe.ai, Visit Galena and Visit NW Illinois.

For more information or to reserve your spot for the limited enrollment sessions, contact David Schmit, Regional Director of NWILED, at 815-297-7361 or email at dschmit@nwiled.org. The program is free for NWILED Members.

ABOUT NWILED:

Northwest Illinois Economic Development was formed in 2008 by the Jo-Carroll Energy Board of Directors whose main goals were to spearhead economic development structures, funding and progress in Jo Daviess, Carroll, and Whiteside counties in Northwest Illinois. The Board’s main focus was to form a regional development entity concentrating on growing the economy and public/private partnerships. NWILED promotes economic development by fostering business growth and assisting expanding and relocating businesses in determining their needs for growth with cooperation of government and business partners. NWILED encourages entrepreneurs by assisting with access to resources to begin and grow their businesses and employ all available resources to create a welcoming business environment, aligning the skills of the available workforce with the needs of businesses, and building political and economic capital. Their office is located at 1 Commercial Drive, Suite 2, Hanover, Illinois 61041.