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## Chamber family-business center nears launch

By Kevin Tampone

Journal Staff

SYRACUSE — The Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce is working with area universities to develop a family-business center.

The project will offer seminars, training, networking, and resources to help family firms grapple with their unique challenges, says Carol Hill, director of work-force solutions and community relations at the chamber.

“What makes the family business unique is the family dynamic you’re dealing with there,” she says.

The closest family-business center is at Niagara University, Hill says. She adds she’s already received calls from companies in Utica and the North Country that are interested in participating in the center’s programming.

The chamber is organizing the project, but its programming will come largely from area colleges like Syracuse University, Le Moyne College, Onondaga Community College, Cayuga Community College, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Morrisville State College, and possibly SUNY Oswego. The project was one of 53 funded with \$20,000 in the latest round of grants from SU’s Syracuse Campus-Community Entrepreneurship Initiative (Initiative).

Funding for Initiative projects comes from a \$3 million, five-year grant awarded

to SU by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation of Kansas City, Mo.

The center also received \$50,000 from the Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency.

Organizers are planning initial programming now. Hill says the family-business center will likely offer an introductory seminar in November that will focus on the economy.

Full programming will be up and running in 2009.

Hill says the seminars and training will focus on all aspects of running family-owned companies. That could include sessions on transitioning leadership between different generations or just handling the day-to-day challenges of working closely with a brother, sister, mother, or father.

Seminars will be geared toward parents, as well as children involved in companies and cover topics like how to deal with non-family members involved in a family firm, Hill says. She adds concentrating programming on younger generations will be just as important as addressing generations that own the companies now.

“How do I deal with my mother or my father? How do I get them to look at new technologies or new markets? How do I get them to retire? These are all things that the younger generation might have questions about,” she says.

Sessions will also likely focus on startup family busi-



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**Clockwise from left: Carolyn May, The Central New York Technology Development Organization; Mike Rosanio, Central New York Regional Planning & Development; Cindy Oehmigen, Central New York Technology Development Organization; Jean Powers, Onondaga Community College Small Business Development Center; Carol Hill, Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce; and Peggy Adams, Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce/Greater Syracuse Business Development Corporation meet to discuss the Family Business Center project.**

nesses and how to encourage children to take an interest in a new company. For example, Hill says, many parents start a business with the goal of passing it on to their kids some day.

If planning for that eventual transition begins when that company is still young, the whole process can be much easier, Hill says.

Another major part of the center will be the ability for family companies to network and learn from each other, she adds. Organizers are developing a Web site for the center that will likely include forums and chat rooms for companies to exchange ideas and possibly connect with business experts as well, Hill

says.

“We’re looking to develop a whole support structure for family businesses,” she says.

The idea for starting the center emerged because of the distance to the family-business center at Niagara University. The Central New York area also has a large number of family companies, Hill says.

They include small companies with just a few employees and big, established firms like Welch Allyn in Skaneateles, Hill says.

“I think that was one of the eye openers of this process,” she says. “There are quite a few of them around here.”

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