



Creative entrepreneur workshop challenges traditional ideals

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Creatives were the focus of a workshop for entrepreneurs Friday evening at **Jacoby Center for the Arts** on Broadway.

The event was presented by **Alton Main Street**, the **Simmons Hanley Conroy Law Firm**, **Liberty Bank** and the Jacoby Arts Center and featured a presentation about developing a creative economy, a presentation of ideas reminiscent of the television show, “**Shark Tank**,” and a cocktail hour for creatives, business owners and community member to mingle.

The presentation was given by **University of Illinois Extension** community economic development educator, **Pam Schallhorn**. Schallhorn warned more than 100 people in attendance to not ignore the creatives dwelling within the Alton area.

“Respect the creatives you already have,” she said. “You don't need to look elsewhere. They're right here.”



In her presentation, Schallhorn said weird, strange and innovative ideas are what will help a struggling economy. She used examples from other Illinois communities such as **Rockford** and **Mt. Vernon** to demonstrate her idea. In those communities, “festival

zones” were created. In those zones, street musicians could perform while wine and beer were sold. She thought an idea like that could take root in Alton.

She also warned against blocking innovation with a fear of change. She used the example of the push against **Piasa Body Arts** coming to Broadway as an example of that occurring in Alton. To bring a creative and thriving economy, she said, such old ways must be changed. She said city government should be diversified to better represent the community, stating people under 30, women and people of different races and sexual orientations should be a part of such decisions.

Following the presentation was the “Shark Tank” pitch forum in which local community members pitched ideas to a panel of local business owners and financial-minded people. That panel included: **Dale Blachford**, the president of **Liberty Bank**, Executive Assistant to **John Simmons**, **Roger Lewis**, **Meredith Elliott**, owner of **Maeva's Coffee** and the **Milton Schoolhouse business incubator**, **Andrea Abbott**, owner of the **Gift Box**, **Chris Miller**, CEO of the **Mission Center of Washington University**, mentor at the **Information Technology Entrepreneur Network** in St. Louis, **Mary Louise Helbig** and local award-winning videographer, **Michael Gebben**, who was the most vocal to the presenters.



In all, 13 ideas were pitched to the panel. Many were in the idea phase of development, but several were already-existing businesses looking for expansion. Several students from **Principia College** were also involved in the pitches.

The top three pitches, according to audience vote, were **MOSH Compost**, a local business hoping to collect food waste and turn it into rich organic fertilizer, **Grassroots Grocery**, which hopes to expand into having a full commercial kitchen for instruction and product, and **Lillian Bates of By Design**, who would like to expand her instruction to a larger room.

“We had six people in class last night,” Bates said during her pitch, “and we were all nearly on top of each other and squished together.”

Previous to speaking on the panel, Elliott said she would advise all pitch-givers to evaluate alternative methods to traditional funding. Her business, Maeva's Coffeeshop opened with the help of a wildly-successful crowd funding campaign. She said online crowd funding, however, was not the only method a small business could, or should utilize.

She spoke about the **Jobs Act of 2012** in Illinois allowing for crowd equity funding. Through that method, a potential investor could review a business's model and plan and then invest for a return on that investment as much as six or eight percent over five years.

“It's very big in Indiana, and the tech industry,” Elliott said. “I would like to see it more in brick-and-mortar industries, which would make it more accessible to Alton.”

Funding and marketing were concerns for the majority of those pitching ideas to the panel.

Music for the cocktail hour was presented by **Vicki Lynn** and **Jay Sabo**.