His speech is a reminder that we are on the right path and that there are bigger and better things around the corner in Ellwood City.

BY WILLIAM V. FOLEY
FOR THE CHAMBER

ELLWOOD CITY—Dr. Nick Neupauer, in his second keynote address to the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce in three years, challenged a crowd of 175 on Dec. 3 to continue on paths of collaboration and enthusiasm that in 2018 led to the debut of long-awaited higher education programming in his hometown.

“Positivity builds momentum,” said Neupauer, president of Butler County Community College, an Ellwood City native and 1985 graduate of Lincoln High School. “It is like the snowball on top of the hill that, as it rolls down, keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger.”

That attitude and energy, he said, are evident in the new businesses on the borough’s main street, in the number of millennials operating those businesses who are “sharing their talents and literally changing the outlook, and the feel and the personality, of Ellwood City” – and in the next wave of young business leaders capitalizing on the newly created Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program.

The initiative for seniors at Lincoln and Riverside high schools, Neupauer said during his “Power of TEAM: Together Everyone Accomplishes More” keynote address at the chamber’s annual meeting to focus on a future governed by a specific economic development plan that incorporates retaining a work force, attracting a new work force and new businesses, and providing an opportunity for individuals to create and nurture their own businesses.

“There was a charge given years ago for Ellwood City to quit talking about what can be, and to put its skin in the game, to fund this program,” Neupauer said. “Sure enough, Ellwood City, the residents, foundations and businesses, raised $65,000” to create the Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program.

“I had a number of people tell me you won’t raise much money in Ellwood City,” Neupauer said. “And because of that old competitor in me, when the program raised $65,000, I made them aware that anything is possible through these tremendous citizens and residents.”

Riv-Ell seniors over the course of an academic year will take classes in financial literacy, psychology, entrepreneurship, marketing, public speaking and business plan development at Smokin Dave’s BBQ, and during field trips will network with, and gain insight from, successful Ellwood City area business leaders.

“These students will work together on a community service project that will benefit our wonderful hometown,” Neupauer said, “and they will be taught by entrepreneurs who have made it on their own.”

Among those entrepreneurs is Caroline Golmic, Riv-Ell facilitator, a business owner in Ellwood City and past president of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce who said Neupauer’s speech only confirmed the conviction that newfound collaboration and enthusiasm are reaping benefits.

“Any time I have heard Dr.

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“Anything is possible”

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Neupauer speak, he is influential and inspirational,” Golmic said. “His speech is a reminder that we are on the right path and that there are bigger and better things around the corner in Ellwood City.”

Riv-Ell students “sharp,” facilitator says

Golmic is equally inspired by the curiosity of her students and the promise of the Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship Program. “These students are sharp,” she said. “It gives me hope for the future of Ellwood City and for the future in general. The Riv-Ell program is forward-thinking. It is progress. It is our community colleges and our school districts coming together. To be able to raise the funds from our local community shows that we are invested in the future of our town.”

The community partnerships behind the Riv-Ell Entrepreneurship program “check so many boxes,” said Neupauer, who commended Dave and Ann Hunter for providing classroom space for the students within their Smokin Dave’s BBQ restaurant. “It speaks to the power of collaboration,” Neupauer said. “It speaks to incredible philanthropy. It speaks to workforce and economic development.”

Speech was “spot-on,” new chamber exec says

Neupauer’s insight resonated with the crowd because he “is an Ellwood City guy,” said Raymond Santillo, executive director of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce. “So when you hear it from the roots of Ellwood City, it means more. He speaks with such enthusiasm. And he is the president of the No. 1 community college in the state two years in a row (in Schools.com surveys). “That,” Santillo said, “brings with it a lot of clout.”

Neupauer urged the crowd to continue to “Squeeze out the naysayers, but in a positive way” and “Do not stop planning and implementing and moving Ellwood City forward.”

Jillian Court and Loralei Galler-Hink said Neupauer’s message bolstered their plan to do just that. “I heard from Dr. Neupauer to keep doing what we have been doing,” said Court, who with Hink will become co-executive directors of the chamber following the year-end retirement of Santillo. “Young people are very important in the community and there has been a lot of teamwork in Ellwood City over the past couple of years.”

Hink said she learned from Neupauer that Ellwood City is “definitely a tight community. It is slowly building into something amazing. And that we need to keep supporting each other, and community, the new business owners, the young business owners and the owners who have been around for years.”

Neupauer’s message was “spot on for the audience,” Galler-Hink said, “and for what we in our minds want to continue to see happening in Ellwood City.”
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