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BUSINESS SUPPORT NETWORK RAIN PLANS SH STOP AFTER VISIT TO COUNTY COMMISSION



MARC MANLEY, center, and Caroline Cummings, left, of RAIN talk with county commissioners, including Roger Nyquist and John Lindsey, right.

By Audrey Caro • Wednesday, March 29, 2017

The Regional Accelerator Innovation Network is looking to nurture entrepreneurs in East Linn County.

A meeting will be held in Sweet Home from 8 to 9 a.m. on April 20 at Sugar Vibes donut shop at the corner of Long Street and 13th Avenue.

RAIN, based in Corvallis and Eugene, serves the entrepreneurs in the south Willamette Valley "by helping them turn ideas into high-impact, innovative, traded-sector companies that can grow and thrive locally," through disciplined mentored business acceleration programs, according to its website, oregonrain.org.

It creates networks that "build and connect resident talent, capital and infrastructure, including the resources of the two research universities, into an intelligent network that is easy for entrepreneurs to access and navigate no matter what stage of business development."

RAIN Executive Director Marc Manley and Caroline Cummings, venture catalyst, updated their activities to the Linn County Board of Commissioners at the March 21 commissioners meeting.

"The model we have cannot be done without the local support," Cummings said.

RAIN is state- and regionally funded. Local support includes government, higher education, businesses, and entrepreneurs.

"The model that we have has allowed us to do outreach in rural communities," Cummings said. "Honestly that's the part that I'm most excited about. I live in Eugene, and I get to travel around and go to the small rural communities and help them."

RAIN's model includes a "meetup," which is a free gathering for anyone who may have an interest in entrepreneurship – from those thinking about starting a business to those wanting to financially invest.

Attendees can expect to share their ideas and also learn more about RAIN.

"We also have investors show up and mentors show up so that they see right out of the gate that there are resources we bring to the table for them," Cummings said.

Manley said mentoring is key. He has experience starting his own businesses and formerly led the Small Businesses Development Center at Linn-Benton Community College.

"I've made every mistake in the book," Manley said. "Learning from those mistakes helps me to help other people avoid those mistakes."

Manley thanked the commissioners for their support and said that RAIN also has support across the state.

"Gov. (Kate) Brown recently joined us in Florence and spoke about how much she values our public-private partnership," Manley said. "I'm glad to say that we have a line item in her budget to continue our work with entrepreneurs in Linn County and in our region. We may be asking for you to help us arm wrestle the legislature to keep that money in the budget."

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After the presentation, Commissioner Roger Nyquist said he could not listen to the presentation without addressing, what in his mind, is the elephant in the room.

"That is the underlying market conditions and realtor conditions that somebody who wants to go into business for themselves faces today," Nyquist said. "It's daunting. It's concerning."

Nyquist is a small business owner and said his peers don't know how a young person will ever get the chance to start a business.

He added that he is appreciative of RAIN's efforts but talked about some obstacles he sees.

"Growing up in a small business household, it seemed that owning your own business was the American Dream," Nyquist said.

He added that it seems the American Dream it seemed to evolved to where the government takes "rich people's money and passes it down to us. It's a dollar-and-cents mentality. The demonization of business by many in society today is very harmful."

Nyquist said he signed Linn County up for RAIN because while things have improved for businesses in Albany and Lebanon, more rural areas such as Sweet Home and Brownsville have been left behind.

"I guess I'm identifying an underlying problem and maybe complaining a bit," he said. "I guess I'd say, in your travels if you get to a place where the regulatory burdens seem to be overwhelming, don't be afraid to engage to us."

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