



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Interview Note: The speakers and panelists will be available for interviews at the emPowerU® Campus during the 9:50 a.m. break and immediately following the close of the event at 12:30 p.m. If you are interested in covering this event and obtaining any interviews, photos, and/or footage, please contact Christel Gollnick, listed above, to coordinate.

Building the region's workforce the focus of Friday's regional gathering at emPowerU®

(e²) education emPowers® initiative remains a priority for the region with over twenty communities expected at Heartland Foundation's 2015 Think Ahead Forum

St. Joseph, Mo. (May 6, 2015) – Individuals from over twenty communities throughout America's heartland are registered to participate in the 2015 Think Ahead Forum to be held this Friday, May 8, 2015 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Heartland Foundation's emPowerU® Campus in downtown St. Joseph, Mo. The theme for this regional conversation is "Building the Region's Workforce," and features national, state, and regional leaders discussing grassroots actions that can be taken to uplift the short-term and long-term value of supporting education's importance from birth through retirement.

"This Forum is a call to action for community members to get involved. Our young people, along with their parents and caregivers, need to know how much the region's businesses, organizations, elected officials, educators, and community members' at large care about their education and well-being," said Judith Sabbert, chief operating officer of Heartland Foundation. "We recognize they are the decision-makers of our future, and want to do all we can to help them learn what they need to be successful in building a more thriving regional community."

The morning's keynote address will be delivered by Bill Millett, founder of Scope View Strategic Advantage, who has more than thirty years of experience working with private, nonprofit and public firms on economic, organizational, and business development. His message to the

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participants, and the region as a whole, regards the growing recognition that quality early education, and greater support of education in general, is very much an issue relating to employers' abilities to find the talent necessary for long-term economic sustainability and competitiveness.

To further catalyze conversations and collaborative action, Peter Herschend, co-founder and co-owner of Herschend Family entertainment (formerly Silver Dollar City, Inc.), and president of the Missouri State Board of Education, will be moderating a panel of business, education, and community leaders from throughout the region. Panelists include: Becky Cleveland, executive director, Brookfield Industrial Development Authority; Debbie Kunz, coordinator, Parents as Teachers, St. Joseph School District; Dr. Ron Lankford, deputy commissioner of education, Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education; Paula Neth, vice president of programs, The Family Conservancy; Dr. Neil Nuttall, president, North Central Missouri College; and, Kent Wilson, director of operations, Northwest Medical Center.

The Forum is being coordinated by Heartland Foundation's (e²) education emPowers® Early Learning Action Team. An initiative of the Healthy Communities Movement, (e²) education emPowers® recognizes the importance of educational attainment and lifelong learning. A cross-section of individuals and organizations have formed a number of volunteer teams addressing strategic leadership, early learning, K-12 education, higher education, workforce development, and communications to find new, collaborative solutions that lead to better jobs, better wages, healthier people and thriving communities. Healthy Communities Regional Investor Partners include Heartland Foundation, managing partner; Missouri Western State University; Mosaic Life Care; North Central Missouri College; Northwest Missouri State University; and, St. Francis Hospital & Health Services. Learn more about the (e²) education emPowers® initiative by calling call 816.271.7200 (800.447.1083) or visiting: <https://www.heartlandfoundation.org/e2>.

Serving as a catalyst, convener and innovator, Heartland Foundation is a public charity dedicated to championing education and empowering people to build healthy and thriving communities. Founded in 1982 and leading the region's Healthy Communities Movement since 1994.

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