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For Immediate Release:

February 1, 2023

Barton County Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge encourages middle and school students to think big!

Barton County's third annual Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge is live and looking for more contestants and business mentors. Students in 7th grade through 12th grade in Barton County can submit a business idea or concept by February 22nd in the hopes of taking home cash. This competition, brought to Great Bend by Great Bend Economic Development and the Great Bend Chamber of Commerce, was created to challenge our youth, encourage our business community to partner with and mentor our younger generations, and foster an entrepreneurial spirit, and is a partnership with NetWork Kansas. NetWork Kansas holds regional and state Youth Entrepreneurship Challenges as part of its mission in developing entrepreneurship ecosystems throughout Kansas. The partnership with NetWork Kansas allows YEC contestants the use of VentureDash, the contestant portal. Great Bend Economic Development and the Great Bend Chamber partner on this competition as both organizations are tasked with strengthening the area's workforce for the business community, and in this case, that means nurturing the next generation's entrepreneurs.

This competition and live trade show will take place at the Great Bend Events Center on March 8th. All participants will share with the public. Students will also present their formal 4-minute presentation to the judges. The judging panel is made up of a wide array of business professionals. The public is invited and encouraged to attend this event to cheer on our student competitors and show their support for the next generation of business ideas. Students learn about writing an executive statement and what is important to share in their 4-minute presentation, but they are also learning some of the soft skills that will help them navigate life in the workforce. A great side effect of this competition is the student competitors gain experience with professional networking with judges, mentors, and the community, as well as building social capital.

After the trade-show portion of the event, the winners will be announced. There is \$2500 in prize money to be divided among the top competitors. Third place will receive \$500, second place will

receive \$750, and first place will receive \$1000 and the opportunity to continue onto the state level competition. Audience members will have a chance to vote for their favorite and award one competitor \$250.

How students can participate

The competition finale is about three months away, so participants are encouraged to get started on their business plans. Students wanting to join the competition can go to the Great Bend Economic Development, Inc. web page for more information on YEC at www.gbedinc.com/yec. This page holds sample business plans, links to resources on giving presentations, as well as a few of 2022's contestant interviews. Also, students can join the competition with a link to the VentureDash contestant portal. After a student joins the competition, they will be paired with a business mentor to help them iron-out details, ask them questions, and fine-tune the student's business plan and presentation.

How the community can participate

The community can help in a few ways, such as a sponsor of the live event or a business mentor for a student. Depending on the sponsorship level, sponsors can speak to the contestants and community before we announce the winners at our live event and/or have their logo on all marketing materials. As a business mentor, you are matched with a student, to help them with their business plans and 4-minute presentation. If you/your business would like more information about sponsoring the live event or becoming a business mentor, please reach out to GBED staff at marketing@gbedinc.com or by calling 620-796-2407.

About GBED (Great Bend Economic Development):

Our goal is to sustain Barton county's long-term economic health and vitality through the retention, expansion, and attraction of businesses and development that enhance property values, increase personal income, and positively contribute to the citizens' quality of life of Barton County.

Great Bend Economic Development leads the charge in creating workforce initiatives to sustain our current employers as well as initiatives that will help to support new employers that move to the community. Employers and jobseekers are encouraged to reach out to GBED with questions and concerns and GBED will either pair you up with a workforce partner to help you accomplish your goals, or work with you one-on-one to create solutions and positive outcomes. Together we will create a strong and sustainable workforce pipeline that will enable us to continue to grow Barton County.

For more information about GBED visit: www.gbedinc.com, call 620-796-2407, or email marketing@gbedinc.com.

