

Young professionals hope campaign generates ideas

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Jackie Hanton, right, of Kimball Township smiles as she stands with Sarah Szurpicki, director of the Great Lakes Urban Exchange, on Thursday during the launch party for the "I Will Stay If ..." campaign at the Vintage Tavern in Port Huron. / MELISSA WAWZYSKO/TIMES HERALD

By JULIANNE
MATTEA
Times Herald

A simple question brought together residents
Thursday night.

Community leaders, students and professionals
packed into Vintage Tavern's upper deck for the Blue
Water Young Professionals' "I Will Stay If ..." launch
party.

The campaign -- which asks participants to complete
the "I Will Stay If ..." slogan -- is designed to create
ideas to make the area more appealing.

About 185 people attended, and most completed the "I Will Stay If ..."
phrase, said Jackie Hanton, co-chairwoman of the young
professionals group and a trust officer at First Michigan Bank in Port
Huron.



Evan Wilkins, right, of Port Huron stands near Brad Barrett of Kimball Township as they listen to Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, on Thursday at the Vintage Tavern in Port Huron. Wilkins and Barrett participated in the launch party for the "I Will Stay If ..." campaign.

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"We were absolutely blown away by the attendance," Hanton said. "We were thrilled with all the responses."

The project started as an effort of the Great Lakes Urban Exchange -- a network of young leaders in the Great Lakes region.

A.J. Armbruster, chairman of the young professionals group, said many attending hoped to have their voices heard through the campaign.

The event's keynote speaker, Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, said leaders should take note of the ideas being generated by young professionals.

"The community should listen and embrace what comes out of this," Pavlov said. "We will have to reform and reinvent Michigan around the knowledge base that the young professionals possess."

Those attending completed the "I Will Stay If ..." phrase in varying ways.

Jody Parmann and Sadaat Hossain, a married couple from Port Huron, said they wanted to see the community recruit and foster original and creative businesses downtown.

Heather Scott, 30, of Fort Gratiot said she would stay if Port Huron promoted healthy lifestyles and embraced growth and learning for people of all ages.

In the next week, the young professionals group will compile answers submitted through the campaign, Hanton said. The answers will be presented to people developing the "Where Blue Meets Green" economic development plan for St. Clair County.

Scott said she looked forward to the next step in the project.

"Hopefully we'll see that some of these ideas are put into action and give us hope," she said.



Jody Parmann

Contact Julianne Mattera at (810) 989-6275 or jmatters@gannett.com.