Laurel Ridge Community College: This is IT Club

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Our conversation today with Guy Curtis, Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College featured Jeff Browne. Jeff serves as the chair for Warren County EDA and is also a member of The Wednesday Group. He explained how those two paths intersect and gave us details for a new club sponsored by The Wednesday Group: This is IT. We talked about why the club was formed, who it targets, and how teens (9-12 grade) can participate. Get more information on their website: https://warrenstronger.org/events and follow them on Facebook.

Guy told us about all the IT programs offered at Laurel Ridge Community College in the form of degrees and certifications. You can get more information about those programs here: LaurelRidge.edu/IT

Transcript

Janet Michael

Hello and welcome to the valley. Today I am your host Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day that means I am staring at the smiling face of Guy Curtis, director of marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Got its fancy Laurel Ridge backdrop on the zoom screen looking all professional today. Guy Curtis.

Guy Curtis

Exactly, always have to look top notch when you're talking. On the radio so. People can see that background, but yes, so happy to be here and glad to be here today and have a great guest to talk about as. Well, thank you for having us.

Janet Michael

And he's a newbie. Jeff hasn't done the show with us, so joining us is Jeff Brown. He is the chairman of the Warren County EDA, as well as a member of the Wednesday group. He's gonna tell us a little bit about how those two paths have crossed, and then the partnership that they are working on with lower Ridge Community College. So Jeff, thank you for taking some time to chat with Guy and I today.

Jeff Browne

Happy to be here. Appreciate it. So the Wednesday group is a group of volunteers that looks at unmet needs in Warren County so. We started a community garden. We have a volunteer fair. We have a variety of other things. We're helping get our youth center equipped for students to be able to go there things along that line. This is it. IIT is capitalized. Information technology is a club for Warren County teens and. The unmet need there is that we need more things for our students to be able to do and we need to be able to offer them career paths and I'll get into more of that when we talk about it. How this works with my EDA role is that building community is 2 things, one being able to offer job. Hubs and two being able to offer economic development, form of taxes and the like having an IT high school club isn't necessarily what an EDA does, but it absolutely works together with what we're trying to accomplish to grow businesses and to grow jobs. Here in Warren County.

Janet Michael

I have a lot of conversations with the other economic development authorities across the Shenandoah Valley and the common denominator when we talk is always work. Force because it's very difficult to bring any new company or have a company that's already here to expand. If you don't have the people, then they're going to need to work in that particular business, and it seems to be the big thing. Now everybody needs it workers.

Jeff Browne

Oh, absolutely. And when you think about it, Northern Virginia has become a hotbed of IT activity nationally and it's expanding and it's coming right down 66. It's expanding on art expanded on 81. And it's going to continue. And and this is an opportunity to take advantage of that, both to offer students jobs. Whether they go to college or they go directly in and start working for a company after they get certified. These are all things to offer and that that's why we wanted to start this club as a good first step in the education process. Is how do? How do we make this opportunity more available for kids in our community?

Janet Michael

Guy Curtis. We've talked about that several times. Is the misconception out there that you have to go to college and get a degree in order to have a job in? It and that isn't the case, especially when it comes to lower Ridge Community College because you have so many of these certifications that are stackable, they can get one and then get a job and then get another and get a better job or get a promotion.

Speaker 2

Yes, exactly. So we say go to college can mean so many new things today and so getting certifications, training hands on experience and going off to college looks dramatically different than it has been. Maybe for many of us as we. Grow up and say hey you need to go to college and or does that exactly mean? But today it's more about aligning your interests, your abilities, as well as looking for local opportunity to make sure your return on investment. In other words, the time and energy put into a program or a certification you hope to get a local job and within the region if that's your ultimate goal, and so connecting. With folks like Jeff and others in our community to just to share those options. On this club. That Jeff is putting on with the Windsor Group was just a great example. So I was excited to hear about it. We learned about it a few weeks ago when we got together for a networking event at the college. And just to know that all of us are working on the same objective, but for me personally and others that are out there too that are thinking about IT or any kind of career involvement. Just go out there and explore options and we were excited to hear about this club. This is it because that's something we're also trying to do at the college and somewhere form. We used to host. So back in the day, many college camps or kids camps, so we still have a few of those that are coming. Whether it's drones or engineering or IT related type of career camps for kids, and so we're all sharing this common interest to explore options. Because college is much different than. What it used to be. Years ago and so today, this great club that's out there, as well as some of the training programs we have. The college, just many ways to get your feet wet in the IT sector, and we know it's an in demand job. Within our region there are so many employers that are reaching out to us for our program completers to help them fulfill that pipeline that they need. And as Jeff mentioned, it's been here growing in our region. We have a lot of employers. Locally, they're asking for our support to help provide that dedicated, talented

pipeline, and so if we're all working together, express what new college looks like. The new options that are out there. It's even better for our local region and workforce.

Janet Michael

Jeff, I had a conversation on the show yesterday with Nikki Foster from the Front Royal Warren County Chamber of Commerce and we were talking a little bit about the Civic Pride workshop that the chamber hosted a few months ago. She recently had a another meet up where they were doing a follow up. They had cookies and conversation and we were talking about what it means for community and some of that. Conversation was. Out making sure that our children know that this generation the next generation, know, understand and appreciate that they can get a job and stay here as a parent. You don't want your kid to really go anywhere. It would be great if they live just down the road or even next county over, but you don't want them going to Northern Virginia going to. California are going to New York City. This is a really great way to get them interested early and then show them the opportunities that are here if they stay.

Jeff Browne

Absolutely. Over 50% of our workforce works outside of the county. And there is a brain drain going on all the time of the bright capable kids leaving because there aren't good opportunities here and this is a I think a terrific start to a program to bring people back. Here you can see behind me where we live. That's actually a photo. I took out our back window. We live in a gorgeous area. And to be able to offer the motivated kids who are interested in it. To be able to stay here to work here and to raise families, I think is the dream of many a parent. And so I think this is exactly what we're trying to do. It's an unmet need, it's something that needs to be done, and it's great to have the backing of Laurel Ridge. We have a number of local companies there that are very involved in this that are going to be. Putting on a presentations as we move forward with it, we've got a lot of backing from IT companies every child in this program is going to have access to a computer so that they have something to work with and most of them don't work with computers, but it's going to be something they're going to have to learn as they get into the. Real World, I think they think maybe they can work on notebooks and I'm not sure that's exactly correct.

Janet Michael

I find that a lot with some of the kids that I talk to is. They're like, why are you using a laptop? Why don't you just use your phone? The phone is good for some things, but it is not good for everything.

Jeff Browne

If you just can't do it on that, this is going to be a program that will start in January on the January 11th it'll be. The other week at the Samuels Public Library from 6:00 to 7:45, students who are interested are free to apply and they can apply at warrenstronger.org/events and applications are due on the 15th. We're also interested in getting IT companies involved. And interested in working with this. We see this as a Community project. It's not an EDA, it's not just a Wednesday group project, but we just sent out something to companies that have IT needs in our area to get them involved in this as well. So just a good opportunity to bring community together as well.

Janet Michael

And when you say teens are you looking for a certain age group, juniors and seniors freshmen sophomore does it matter if they're in a Warren County public school or homeschooled, or at Dominion Ridge someplace like that?

Jeff Browne

Great question. First of all, it's open to public school, private school home school children. Secondly, it's open to students in grades 9 to 12. The old joke in the IT community is if your if your senior can't answer it, ask a 9th grader. Age isn't as an important thing in IT, it's just that's the reality of it. We're trying to open it up. We have a limited number of spaces and they just have to have applications in by the 15th. And we look forward to getting this started.

Janet Michael

Let's take a break. When we come back I want to expand a little bit on what you were just saying about having this be a community project overall, and what these kids can expect to do for that hour and a half that they're at this club meeting. Can we talk a little bit about that? Maybe you can do a shout out to some of the companies that you want. To reach out to you and say, hey, I heard on the radio. You're asking for me, and maybe we'll get you some more community partners. Can we do that in the next segment? We are on the screen today with Guy Curtis. He is director of marketing for Lower Ridge Community College. Joining him is Jeff Brown. Jeff is the chairman of the board of the Warren County EDA. He is also a part of the Wednesday group. We're talking about the this. Is it it as in IT club that they are starting and some of the IT programs that Laurel Ridge has to offer? We're gonna do more of that when we come back in just a couple of minutes.

Speaker 4

Hello, I'm Mariah Garneau and I am a graduating senior at Mountain Vista Governor School and we are partnering with a local environmental nonprofit. Sustainability matters to help yourself while helping the planet. Here is a helpful daily tip to promote sustainability in your life. The fast fashion repurchase from stores is mass produced and often used as cheaper materials. As a result, they wear out and end up in landfills. Buying clothing that is eco friendly, fair trade or made from recycled materials is better for the environment. Buying second hand makes 1 garment last longer, reduces the demand for mass production and also saves you money. You can even donate or sell old clothing instead of throwing them away. Every small action we take towards saving the environment is another step closer to saving our planet. Thank you for listening. This has been an ecologically exciting message from Mountain Vista Governor School and sustainability matters. Reminding you that together we can keep the river clean and the valley green.

Janet Michael

Welcome back to the valley. Today I am your host Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day Guy Curtis, of course then is on the screen with me. He is their director of marketing. Joining him is Jeff Brown. Jeff is chairman of the Warren. County EDA he's also part of the Wednesday group we've been talking about the this is. Club it being IT Jeff you mentioned before we started recording that you really wanted to build an IT community in Warren County and this is it. Club really is the beginning of that. It's going to probably be the foundation for being able to do that.

Jeff Browne

Yeah, we actually have several parts to it, so the IT club is part of it. A second part is. Bringing members of the IT community together on a regular basis. Whether it's going to a bar and talking on a regular basis or having a speaker. But these are all things that we want to do as a member of EDA. It's really important that I can say to companies, hey, we already have an IT community. It's already very active. We're doing a variety of things, becomes one of the things that I can. I could talk about as a reason to come here. We have a lot of great reasons for people to come here, but that's an additional one, and IT companies would be a really great fit not only for Warren County, but the entire Shenandoah. Right?

Janet Michael

The fact that this Club is geared towards 9th to 12th graders. Is fantastic too, because that's at the age where they're trying to figure out maybe what they want to be when they grow up or they still don't know, but they know they're good with computers or they like technology, and maybe that's gonna be their entrance. Into the job market? Maybe not the one that they follow, but it's a great way to get them interested. What kinds of things will they be doing every other week when they come for these club meetings?

Jeff Browne

We're going to take a different segment of it in. Session and we probably will start by having a representative of a company, whether it's locally or nationally. Just talk about what they're doing, whether they have internship programs and giving them a real world sense of what it is that they're doing. Then we'll have a course curriculum. I hate to call it teaching, but it's going to be a lot of learning. But an opportunity just to be exposed to it. That's the goal to it. And then we're also going to have a component where either there will be a demonstration, a hands on demo. Operation or project that we do. We have a bunch of fun things that we're planning as the course goes on, we're going to have at the end of the year an escape room. They'll be computer based for doing that. They're going to be prizes, swag, we'll probably have team competitions, just a variety of things that we're going to work with, and the goal is these are kids. That we really want to be able to get internships for and to give them scholarship opportunities, whether they're going to Laurel Ridge off to a local university. So it's a combination of both. A pretty intensive learning but also to have a good time doing it.

Janet Michael

Guy Curtis. I'm guessing this is where they may lean on you a little bit more because all of these IT programs that you offer at lower rates. You already have relationships established with a lot of our local companies in all of the different areas, from data management to here's the new phrase that I learned last week, a data science. Contest I think I want to change my career and become a data scientist, but cybersecurity all of those kinds of things you guys offer at Laurel. Ridge, so you'll. Be able to work with Jeff and that this is at club to bring in some of those speakers and highlight some of those jobs.

Speaker 2

Yes, we do. As a matter of fact, for our fast track credential industry credential training programs we offer, we do have a number of employers, 11 of them at this time that offer a guaranteed to interview and. That speaks to. Our partnership and community and developing and helping those organizations,

but also. So the job demand and the need in our region. So in other words, those companies recognize the credentials and the the skills that students come and receive through the college and want to hire those hooks directly out of our programs. And so that's just a fast track approach away to some of those trainings and programs, but certainly we'll offer a number of other degrees and programs if you're already in the pathway. You've had experience and want to build on your foundational learning that you've had. There's cloud, as you mentioned, software development. The science piece is actually something very new. I recall actually getting hit by a few. Ads about do you want to be a computer science specialization of some sort and like that sounds very interesting, but anyway, I we know those jobs are in demand. They're looking for companies and and folks to support them, and somewhere in form, and so we're happy to be a part of that mix and helping fill that dedicated pipeline within our workforce and within our region. So yes, so many of those programs are available, and we do have. A lot of this class is starting now, so depending on where you are as either a high school student that's about to graduate and if you are an individual in the community, may be considering IT as a. Potential start for a new career, or if you're already in it, we do have a number of courses starting January 17th as part of our 14 week program and January 30th as part of our twelve week program of degree and certificate programs. But if you want to fast track if you are an individual, perhaps, and this is something we haven't explored too much, Jeff, but perhaps there is a high school senior. Who is graduating this spring and is able to start their career right away? In other words, if they were looking to start, it would be our CompTIA. IT of fundamental certification course, it's a in demand industry credential that can get accomplished in a. Matter of a. Few weeks and that starts as early as January. 7th, If you're looking to build off and start their IT program or career path sooner than later, but I think all of what Jeff has mentioned as far as that camp and his hands on learning experiences are a great example. Of exploring your options and just seeing if you like that career area because there's a lot of technology and post pandemic and we know there's so many new ways to to engage online and stay connected, and and certainly the data that's going across the information that's being shared, things that need to be updated and refreshed to recruit to whatever it is you're doing. We know it, and the cyber is. A big piece of that so. We're excited to be that peace within our community.

Janet Michael

Jeff Guy brings up a good point in that there's the potential when this club starts in January for you to have a junior or a senior who really goes all in and finds what their passion is going to be for their career path moving forward. They could take some of these certification classes. They could get into some of these fast track. Programs you're hoping that the Wednesday group will also offer. Maybe some scholarship opportunities for those that maybe can't get over that hump. Of the cost. Of continuing their education, but it's entirely possible they could start off in your club and end up in a job somewhere here in the area. By the time they graduate, if not by the. End of the summer.

Jeff Browne

Yeah, that's certainly a goal we want to excite them, interest them and then give them opportunities. And this is part of the growth cycle of being a teen and then moving into adulthood is figuring out that career path and we're just going to try to help. And those that are interested are going to pursue it, but certainly one of the things I have to hit the guy up is to either get him or somebody else from Laura. To to come and talk to the kids because career paths is a very important part of it, we talk about IT as this monolithic unit. The fact is that they're 30 or 40 different occupations you could go to. Probably it's way

more than that, but that's about as much as I think we're going to be able to cover. But those are all things that Laurel Ridge just got a lot of programs. Somebody will say hey I wanna do big data. They've got programs for it I wanna do cyber security. They have programs for it. I think it's a a nice combination and a good partnership.

Janet Michael

The other potential that this club has is when you get these kids coming to these meetings and these classes every other week. Ideally they're going back home then and telling their parents they're talking to mom and dad about what they've learned, and they're showing them whatever project they're working on for their homework for that particular class, and it tends to spill over, and maybe then mom and dad are thinking, wait? I understand what you're telling me here. Here this is kind of interesting to me too. Maybe I should reach out to Laurel Ridge Community College and look into some of these classes. It really will have this ripple effect.

Jeff Browne

I think that's entirely the point of it. It's building community and this is an area that we can do it in. Our community garden is all volunteer based and the whole goal of it was to bring families together for parents to be able to say, hey, here's the way you can help your community. And we're doing tons of food every summer for people and and this is a similar thing where you're building community. You're building a family and getting them involved, and that's one of the nice things about Laurel Ridge. It's not just for one kind of student, it's for students that across the board whether they just want to learn a little bit more or they want to get a certification. And move into a field. It's it. As I said, it's a great partnership.

Janet Michael

And where can people go if a parent is listening or even a teen is listening now and they want more information or they want to get the application for the this is it club? Where do they go?

Jeff Browne

So it would be warrenstronger.org/events. In addition, we have a Facebook page for the club that's at facebook.com/this. Is it club?

Janet Michael

And I'll put links to both of those on the show notes page, so if somebody's in the car and they're driving or they're having lunch and listening and they have nothing to write this down, just go to the valley today, bike as like all of it will be there and guy, you have a specific place even on the Laurel Ridge Community College website that lists out all of the IT programs. Talks more about those fast track programs CompTIA all of.

Speaker 2

That that's right. Edge.edu/IT, that's an easy place to go, and certainly if you have questions I'm happy to help too. I'm do a little sod experiment here. You mentioned me or reach out to me directly through our lower which website I'd be glad to help you answer any of the questions you have about it training and where to get started and curious to know because I have some stories too because I might want to have.

Some fun with you guys as far as. Learning what's out there and understanding options and I'm kind of a closet IT guy too myself. So if you didn't know that about me, you know perhaps consider me in there too. But any rate? Yeah, reach out to me if you have questions or if you just want to simplyvisitlowerridge.edu/IT that'll help you get there.

Janet Michael

Fantastic and I want to thank both of you for taking some time to chat with me today. I appreciate it. This is really cool information.

Jeff Browne

Thank you very much for having me on and I look forward to doing this again.

Speaker 2

Thanks so much Janet.

Janet Michael

I will be back tomorrow. It is strolling Strasburg with A twist. We are shopping small while strolling Strasburg. Tomorrow, Olivia Hilton and I recorded that show last week and we just walked around and spent some money and took some pictures and talked to some of the small business owners in Strasburg so that you can learn what's in some of their stores and shop local this holiday season. Meet me back here a few minutes after noon and I will have that conversation ready to go for you.