Stetson University Family Business Center hosts first Family Business Gathering

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Promoting the topic of family business on the nation’s business agenda is a primary mission of Stetson University’s Family Business Center, which hosted its first Family Business Gathering Oct. 15 to 17 at the Stetson University Center at Celebration.

Eleven national players in the family-business field participated in the gathering with Stetson stakeholders, including students and their parents interested in family business, family-business owners, professionals who work with family business, and Stetson faculty and staff interested in family business.

Each expert brought a draft of an article related to the Stetson Family Business Center’s theme for 1999-2000: “The Holistic Model: Rethinking the Role of the Family Business Center in the University.” The articles will be edited and compiled into a book that will be sent to every accredited university and family business center nationwide.

“The gathering was an opportunity to bring together top national figures from the field of family business and interested people from the Stetson community,” said Dr. Greg McCann, director of the Family Business Center. “The gathering and the book created from it will help shape the future of Stetson’s Family Business Center, as well as other centers.”

McCann, who is an associate professor of decision and information sciences, said the event supported the Family Business Center’s goals of establishing the field of family business as a legitimate academic discipline, promoting the topic of family business on the nation’s business agenda, and helping families learn, grow and prosper.

Founded in 1998 and based in Stetson’s School of Business Administration, the Family Business Center gained importance at Stetson when school faculty surveyed students and discovered that 42 percent of undergraduate business majors planned to work in their own families’ businesses, and more than half overall expected to work for a family business.

McCann notes that the center has developed a "holistic model" that integrates a curriculum for students, a learning community for family businesses, and faculty scholarship. Under this approach, the Family Business Center will have one of the first undergraduate programs in the nation devoted solely to the topic of family business, said McCann, who was quoted in the Christian Science Monitor as saying that "by creating an academic grouping, Stetson becomes one of only a few schools to treat family business as a serious discipline."

Though based in the School of Business Administration, the center’s approach is multidisciplinary, incorporating people and resources from the entire Stetson community. The learning community within and outside Stetson supports family business through retreats such as the Family Business Gathering, peer groups, and the ongoing study of development issues. The curricular concentration offers a series of four courses to students.

Undergraduate students who come from families who own businesses can take advantage of the four-course family business concentration, which is open to any major and focuses on three career tracks within family business -- active ownership, being a family member/employee, and becoming a leader/eventual successor. Students in the concentration learn about both family and business. The courses are aimed at developing students’ awareness and skills to make informed choices to better serve and succeed in their family business, McCann said.

The center kicked off the family business concentration with two classes offered this fall. The first is a special section of the business school’s course for first-year students designed especially for students who come from families who own businesses. The second is "Family Business Profiles: Character, Ethics and History," which assesses the personality traits of individuals found in the field of family business and traits that contribute to success or failure.

Nationally recognized family-business experts who participated in the Family Business Gathering included Dr. Joe Astrachan, chair of Family Business at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Ga., who is also editor of Family Business Review and principal and chief financial officer of The Family Business Consulting Group Inc.; Kristi McMillan, assistant director of Kennesaw State University’s Family Enterprise Center; Dr. Edwin Cox of Doud/Hausner & Associates, Glendale, Calif.; Dr. Ramona Heck, who leads the Family Business Research Institute at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.; Dr. Steven Hobbs, who holds a faculty appointed position at the University of Alabama Law School, Tuscaloosa, as the Tom Bevill Chairholder of Law; Dr. Dennis Jaffe, professor at Saybrook Institute, where he has designed and coordinates the doctoral program for mid-career professionals on organizational inquiry. He is also a founding partner of Changeworks
Solutions, San Francisco, where he consults with organizations and family businesses; Andrew Keyt, executive director of the Loyola University Family Business Center, Chicago; Dr. Sam Lane, LBF & Associates, Fort Worth; Richard Narva, co-founder and principal consultant of Genus Resources Inc., one of the nation's preeminent consulting firms to family business; Greg Wilder, a partner in the Miami office of Arthur Andersen and a member of the firm's national family business team; Dr. Nancy Upton, the Ben Williams Professor of Entrepreneurship at Baylor University, Waco, Texas; and McCann.

Stetson student stakeholders included sophomore marketing major Anna Richardson and her parents, Ron and Vicki Richardson; freshman general business major Justin Hollis and his father, Jack Hollis; senior general business major Rick Reis; sophomore communications studies major Lee Murray; sophomore general business major Jamie Rusbridge; and senior computer science major Brian Mistler.

Stetson faculty and staff participants included Vice President for University Relations Mark Whittaker; Marketing Department Chair Michelle DeMoss; School of Business Administration Dean Paul Dascher; Stetson President Doug Lee and Margaret Lee; Andrew Whittaker, technology curriculum specialist for the School of Business Administration; and Jeff Spoeri, associate director of development, School of Business Administration. Participating members of the Family Business Center's professional boards include Henry Givens, John Curtis, and Bill Voges, who is also a member of the School of Business Administration Board of Advisors. Facilitators were Barry Lockenbach and Nancy Barber.

Family-business owner participants included Dean Doug Grider, Rosemary McCann, Norm McCann, Daisy Medici, Dirk McMillan, and Dennis Higginbotham.

More information about the Family Business Center is available at the center's Web page at http://www.stetson.edu/departments/family.