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Brownfields assistance program goes statewide

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. -- West Virginia University and Marshall University are joining forces to help communities throughout the Mountain State redevelop blighted former industrial sites known as brownfields.

The two universities are seeking communities that would like to apply for up to \$5,000 in assistance to redevelop their brownfield sites under a program known as Foundation for Overcoming Challenges and Utilizing Strengths (FOCUS) West Virginia Brownfields.

The program, administered by the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center at WVU, began in 2009 and originally focused on sites in northern West Virginia. Next year, WVU will partner with Marshall's Brownfields Assistance Center to help communities statewide access financial and technical assistance to work on redevelopment efforts. It is funded by the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation.

"We are pleased that this successful program has expanded to include all of West Virginia. Development professionals across the state will now be able to tap into the funding opportunities and technical assistance that the FOCUS WV Brownfields Program provides," George Carico, program coordinator for the Brownfields Assistance Center at Marshall University said.

The FOCUS WV Brownfields program provides direct financial assistance to communities in the form of small grants, and also helps eligible communities apply for assistance from other sources. According to Patrick Kirby, director of the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center, communities can use the program's resources to better position themselves to compete for federal redevelopment funds, and to help bring additional resources and expertise to West Virginia.

More important, the program, "offers communities a starting point to create a plan of action to turn community eyesores into assets," Kirby said.

Communities often redevelop brownfield properties to include a strategic community interest, Kirby said. Brownfields are abandoned or underutilized properties that have not

been redeveloped due to real or perceived environmental barriers. Examples include former gas stations, glass factories, machine shops, manufacturing and processing facilities, dry cleaners and mine scarred lands.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to participate in one of the web-based conference call training sessions on Dec. 1 and 3 at noon. RSVP to: focuswv@mail.wvu.edu or (304) 293-2867 x 5447.

Information about the FOCUS WV Brownfields Program is at www.wvbrownfields.com. The Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center is at the West Virginia Water Research Institute, at WVU's National Research Center for Coal & Energy; the Brownfields Assistance Center at Marshall University is in the Center for Environmental, Geotechnical and Applied Sciences.

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