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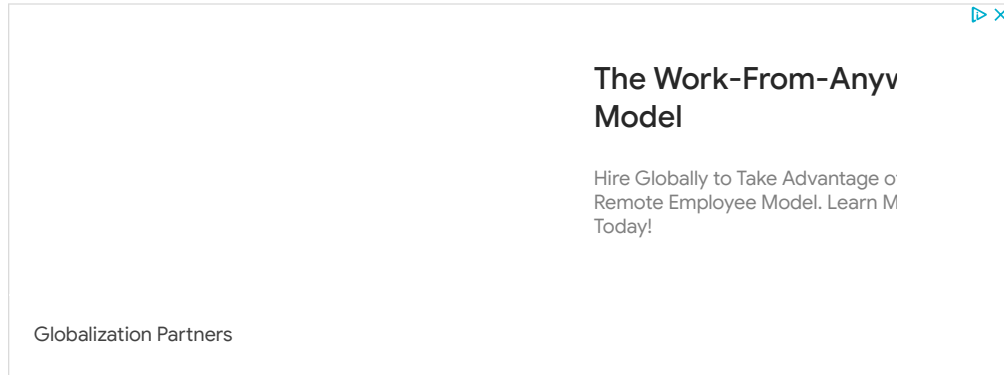
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## Nonprofit focuses on 'future of work' with kickoff event

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com)  
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Local nonprofit AccelerateKY – which seeks to unleash the creative potential of Kentucky’s innovators and entrepreneurs – held its first key event Friday at Western Kentucky University’s Innovation Campus.

Throughout the day, attendees shared their stories and ideas for moving the state’s economy into a new age, with the future of work as a key focus. AccelerateKY’s kickoff event also featured remarks from keynote speaker Phil Budden with the MIT REAP initiative, along with a series of “lightning talks” from a range of innovative Kentuckians across several business sectors.



Among them was Buddy Steen, president of the WKU Research Foundation, who spoke about the work of the university’s Research and Development Center along Nashville Road, which acts in part as a venue for business startups.

“Over the past 18 years, we’ve created thousands of jobs. The revenues from the companies in that facility – over \$2 billion in revenue. The (accumulated) payrolls, they’re over \$200 million. Now, those are dollars coming in and going into the community,” Steen said.

AccelerateKY was born out of founder Sam Ford’s relationship with leaders at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology REAP initiative, or Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program.

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While working at MIT in 2016, Ford got into a conversation about the future of work, Ford recently told the KY Inno business journal. A world-renowned roboticist told Ford: “I look at the future of work. I see all these possibilities, new technologies and new fields being created, but I feel like there’s a lot of pessimism about the future of work.”



“I just offhandedly said something like, ‘Well, it’s hard to be excited about the future if you don’t think you’re in it,’” Ford told KY Inno. “If you’re in a place like Boston, people are excited about the future of work because they imagine it will happen there. The narrative that often exists is that if you’re in a place like Kentucky, it won’t happen here.”

Drawing on those connections with MIT, Ford was able to make Kentucky the first U.S. site for MIT’s REAP initiative in 2018.

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Another speaker during Friday’s conference was Elon Justice, a journalist who seeks to turn the negative narratives and stereotypes posed upon Appalachian people by popular media on their head.

To accomplish that, the WKU and MIT graduate launched the Appalachia Retelling Project.

“The Appalachia Retelling Project is supposed to be a way for Appalachians to reclaim the narrative about themselves. ... Its goal is to challenge stereotypes of Appalachia by creating a more honest and nuanced collage of what it means to be from the mountains by including a lot of different perspectives,” Justice said of the collaborative documentary project.

“Very rarely do Appalachians get the chance to tell their own stories,” Justice said.

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