

# Small Business Networking 2012-13

## The Need: To Offer Local Small Business Owners Networking Opportunities

Since 2010, when Industry Leaders Lunch Series was launched, Clinton County small business owners have been asking for their own venue for networking. These small businesses, including both owner/operators and budding entrepreneurs, have a common need for professional development, community information, and opportunities to connect in meaningful ways—that are different from the needs of the larger industries (mostly located in the industrial park on State Road 28 in Frankfort). They also have a need to become organized as a group to take advantage of collective opportunities for branding/marketing/outreach, as well as be informed of programming offered by Purdue Extension and other local and statewide entities, such as Indiana’s Companies to Watch, and OCRA’s Main Street initiatives.

## The Response: Small Business Networking Sponsored by Purdue Extension

Starting in February 2013, Purdue Extension's Learning Network of Clinton County reached out small businesses in Frankfort, inviting them to meet on the second Tuesday morning of each month. A local coffeehouse, Flavors, agreed to host the event by providing both the venue and the coffee. Frankfort’s Mayor McBarnes launched the first meeting, speaking to a crowd of more than 25 small business owners, franchisees, and entrepreneurs. At our March meeting, many of the first-time attendees returned and new members joined. By April 2013, the group had decided to host a presence on MeetUp.com to attract others either currently doing business in Clinton County--or interested in the prospect. By June, I began focusing more heavily on professional development, inviting Frankfort’s Street Department to discuss trash removal (an issue for business), Farmer’s Bank to discuss small business financing options, and a local accountant to discuss common “tax traps” for small business owners to avoid.

## The Impact: 120 Participants Enjoy Enhanced Regional Referral Business

After nearly one year of offering Small Business Networking in Frankfort, a group of 15 regular attenders have emerged. They are small business owner/operators, franchisees, and entrepreneurs who have attended the majority of the eight meetings held at Flavors Coffeehouse from 7:30-8:30 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month, resulting in 120 direct contacts. In addition to individual participants in the small business networking “MeetUps,” many local partnerships have been cultivated, including those with: the Clinton County Chamber of Commerce, City of Frankfort, Flavors



Coffeehouse, MCF Hardware, Mediaryte Design, Kim Dahmen CPA, and the Farmers Bank. Through referral cards, which are passed out and collected at each meeting, the revenue being generated via networking is a quantifiable incentive to return to the group—and contribute to its success.