

Alumna to speak at annual Power of Women Luncheon and Expo

By Kayla Gaffney

Southeast Missouri State University is recognizing the importance of networking for its students by holding the Fifth Annual Power of Women Luncheon and Expo March 30 with alumna Dr. Maureen Clancy-May as this year's keynote speaker.

This event first was created as a way to raise money for female scholarships, but has grown into a way for students to make connections with professional women in the community with the hope of turning those connections into internships or future jobs.

According to Cindy Gannon, senior associate director of athletics and senior woman administrator, the reason for creating scholarships for women wasn't that Southeast was lacking in that area, but to directly involve the women of the community with the university.

"I think it was more of creating awareness, not that there weren't enough women receiving scholarships – it was actually creating scholarships out of this event so it would make the women in the community know that they're actually making a contribution back to the university," Gannon said. "Any opportunity we have to promote women on our campus, to help women on our campus – make sure that they can go out and make an impact on the world."

The expo is designed to give local businesses, many of which are owned and operated by women, the opportunity to showcase their services and to connect with students. Although being directly beneficial to students, the event also is open to Southeast faculty and staff as well as professionals in the area.

Amanda Lincoln, director of development for the Southeast Missouri University Foundation, said the event has gotten a lot of support from both Southeast alumni and the community.

"The idea is to really help make connections with our students," Lincoln said. "We have so many amazing alums and so many amazing women in the community who want to help students, so this is a cool way to do it."

Students can attend this event for free by picking up a ticket at the University Center in the Campus Life and Event Services office. But another way to get involved is to become a student ambassador for the event. When businesses purchase a table, two student ambassadors are assigned to each table based upon their majors.

"We match up the majors to the businesses that come so it's a better opportunity for the students," Lincoln said. "It gives the student a chance to really network. ... What we've seen over the years is a lot of really good stuff – the relationships that are made will be really beneficial."

Every year, a Southeast graduate or professional who is closely connected to Southeast is chosen to speak at the luncheon. Lincoln said having these women speak has an effect on everyone in attendance.

“Every single year we invite these women to come back,” Lincoln said. “I think it’s inspiring for everyone to hear their story especially to students. I think everyone walks away feeling really good about the luncheon.”

This year’s keynote speaker, Clancy-May, is a 1979 graduate of Southeast and has had a career in the educational field for more than 35 years, from teaching in the Special School District to eventually becoming an assistant superintendent in the Riverview Gardens School District. She currently works as a state supervisor for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in St. Louis.

Lincoln said she thinks Clancy-May will have a good message to deliver to the women at the luncheon.

“Maureen is so inspiring because she has such a passion for helping others achieve success, and she has spent her entire career doing that,” Lincoln said. “When you’re in education you have an opportunity to touch so many lives and I feel like she’s done that above and beyond.”

Every year the event grows in size from the businesses that participate, people who attend and the students who receive these scholarships. Gannon said the reason for the growth of this event may be that people are recognizing its benefits.

“As the scholarships grow and seeing the number of female students that we are influencing – that is powerful enough in itself to say, ‘My dollars are helping someone else achieve greater things,’” Gannon said.

The proceeds from the event go toward the scholarships, but additional donations also are a part of funding these scholarships. To learn more about this event or to donate, contact the Southeast Missouri State University Foundation. To learn more about becoming a student ambassador for this event, contact the Campus Life and Event Services office at (573) 651-2280.