

Local News: Richardson

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Seminar finds eager audience

379 attend new tech group's free session for entrepreneurs

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By IEVA M. AUGSTUMS / The Dallas Morning News

Stanley Poag didn't care that he had no reservation for the Technology Alliance of Dallas' gathering.

The 77-year-old from Richardson got in line Saturday with hundreds of other eager entrepreneurs who wanted a seat at the high-tech seminar.

"If I get a seat, great. If I don't, I don't," Mr. Poag said as he was given a slip of paper that showed he was No. 24 on the event's waiting list. "I am here now, and I am going to make the most of it."

Mr. Poag's enthusiasm was an indication of the alliance's success in putting on its first event, a free half-day entrepreneur seminar at the University of Texas at Dallas. The group was founded by six local high-tech groups to help start-ups.

"We wanted to create a forum for sharing knowledge and networking," said Neil Kaden, chairman of the MIT Enterprise Forum of Dallas-Fort Worth, one of the alliance's founding groups. "What we didn't expect was for so many people to be interested."

Preregistration for the seminar closed early after 350 people signed up. An additional 352 people were placed on a pre-registration waiting list, and almost 100 people showed up Saturday without registering, Mr. Kaden said.

In all, 379 attended the event, including Mr. Poag.

"I was very enthusiastic that I was able to attend all the sessions," said Mr. Poag, who is interested in getting his advertising agency, Stanley and Livingston, an online home. "There were people there who will truly be young entrepreneurs, but even an old guy like me learned a lot."

Saturday's program, "Unleashing your Entrepreneurial Potential," included panel discussions, networking opportunities and talks with venture capitalists who offered resources for starting up new businesses.

Curtis L. Wade of Plano said the afternoon provided him with insight on how venture capitalists decide which companies they want to fund.

"There seems to be a lot of venture capital companies out there that are ready to give money away," said Mr. Wade, president and chief executive of the Wade Consulting Group Inc. "What I liked was how they flat-out told us we have to have something that is really going to grab their attention."

Joylyn Quintana, a business development executive from McKinney, said the seminar allowed her to hear other people's stories about how they started their companies.

"It was a very positive and inspiring afternoon. They need to have more of these," said Ms. Quintana, who works for the management consulting firm DLH Ventures LLC. "The workshops helped me understand our organization better and what others want and need when they are starting up a business."

Howard Chen, vice president of the Dallas-Fort Worth Chapter of the Chinese Institute of Engineers, another alliance organizer, said that despite the success of the inaugural event, the group does not have any plans to hold another entrepreneur seminar. But the response to Saturday's event may force the alliance to reconsider.

"Our initial plan was to hold one of these seminars each year, but maybe we will have to rethink that," Mr. Chen said. "We are planning other events, but nothing has been decided yet."

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