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NMU starting to ‘SHINE’

Partnership focuses on sustainability

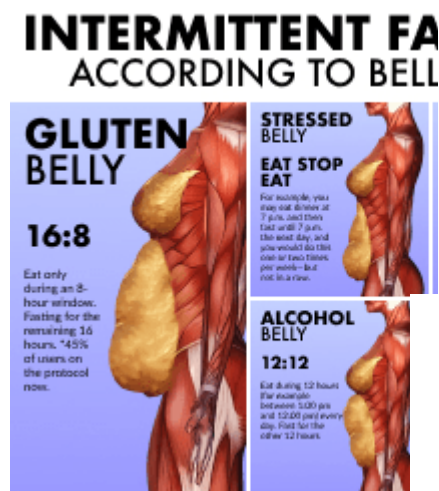
MARQUETTE — People First Economy is launching a partnership with Northern Michigan University’s Sustainability Hub for Innovation and the Environment — SHINE — to support Upper Peninsula businesses in efforts to develop sustainable and socially impactful best practices.

By using tools such as the SDG, or Sustainable Development Goals, Action Manager and B Impact Assessment — two assessments to measure the impacts of social and environmental practices — SHINE will work with People First Economy, based in Grand Rapids, to use technical assistance and sustainability expertise to U.P. companies.

Its goal is to help businesses attract and retain diverse workforces, create a sustainable supply-chain development, reduce their carbon footprints, and assist with environmental stewardship and community impact.

“This is the first public kind of moment where we’re saying that SHINE is a thing,” said Jessica Thompson, public relations professor and co-director of SISU: The Innovation Institute at NMU, at a Tuesday gathering at the Ore Dock Brewing Co.

Following a sustainability audit on campus, Thompson said it was discovered there was much work to be done.



“We had room to grow and build sustainability as part of not just a core value of the institution but part of our community,” Thompson said.

That led to the partnership with People First, which operates with two program areas: Good For Michigan and Local First.

Thompson said SHINE has four main focus areas: student initiatives, activities on campus, thought leadership and business partnerships.

She mentioned the EcoReps, NMU’s student sustainability group, which is involved in activities such as zero-waste events.

“We found that this was a service that these students could offer among lots of other things — sustainability, leadership and serving as ambassadors on campus and in the community,” Thompson said.

On campus, NMU's efforts range from trying to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 to finding a place to put compost.

"We found that we have 85 of 350 faculty members doing research that is related to sustainability, whether it's equity in the workplace or energy efficiency and different types of renewal options," Thompson said regarding the thought leadership component.

A question arose: Do these people talk with each other?

"We've got a brain trust that is ready to share some information out," Thompson said.

People First Economy, she noted, is involved in business partnerships.

Hanna Schulze, president of People First Economy, said the organization was born out of a local organization, Local First.

"We still do identify with that grassroots spirit," Schulze said. *"We've been able to do a lot of work building relationships within the community of business leaders downstate for a long time, and in doing so, we discover that business owners — very much like yourselves, for those folks who are entrepreneurs in the room — just by being locally owned businesses, small businesses, in your community, are already doing incredible work."*

Its partnership with SHINE, she noted, represents that grassroots effort.

Alice Jasper, program director for People First Economy, said the partnership's purpose is *"working to bring together business leaders, business owners, in the Marquette area and the Upper Peninsula to work collectively as well as get independent support in how they can measure their social and environmental impacts."*

That partnership will involve students to give them experience in supporting businesses, technical assistance, measuring businesses' social and environmental impacts, and making recommendations and helping implement more sustainable practices.

“We’re really excited to be working on this partnership where we can also bring our future leaders in sustainability along with us and learn in ‘real time’ how to apply some of those skills,” Jasper said.

For more information, visit www.nmu.edu/shine.

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