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By Kelly Scanlon, Publisher

Local Small Businesses Bring Global Exposure to KC

While other large U.S. cities vie for the SuperBowl and major-league caliber events, Kansas City has quietly landed the 2011 Olympics.

The global business Olympics, that is. Futurallia is the largest conference of small business owners and global entrepreneurs in the world. And it's coming to Kansas City May 18-20, 2011, marking the first time the event will take place in the United States.

"Futurallia is the Olympics of entrepreneurship," said Joey Edgerton, the director of international affairs and trade development for the Mid-America Regional Council.

And while the news broke rather quietly, Edgerton and Kansas City entrepreneurs who have been participants in previous Futurallia events are certainly making a lot of noise now. When I attended the announcement meeting at the Kauffman Foundation in early March, Edgerton was clearly fired up as she explained the event and encouraged local businesses to join the Kansas City contingent for this year's event in Poitiers, France. Likewise, Gary and Trish Walker, owners of Magic Touch Cleaning and Kay Saunders and Jami Henry of Bellewether were effusive about the positive impact previous Futurallia events had on their businesses.

Futurallia participants from more than 40 countries meet annually for one reason, and one reason only: to buy and sell products and services. CEOs and owners of small to mid-size businesses journey from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and the Middle East to take advantage of 15 personalized, 30-minute, one-on-one meetings in two days, which they pre-select from the official online catalog.

Gary Walker of Magic Touch said he didn't stop at that, scheduling even more meetings once he arrived at last year's conference and barely finding time to sleep. All of the previous attendees I've

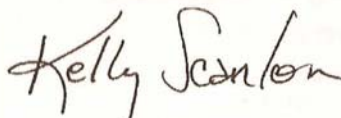
talked to aren't just excited about Futurallia—they trip over each other telling stories about how the event increased their existing business, aided in finding new global business partners, helped to open new export markets and assisted with establishing new international business relationships. Henry of Bellewether, for example, met a new business partner from Quebec at last year's Futurallia, and together they are launching a new product in May.

While Futurallia 2011 has many organizational supporters, including Kauffman Foundation, Oppenheimer Brothers Foundation, Mid-America Regional Council and others, Kansas City's entrepreneurial contingent also played a major role in ensuring that Kansas City would be selected over the likes of Atlanta and Raleigh/Durham.

Edgerton estimates that the economic impact of the event will be in the millions. But, frankly, that's just the beginning. Businesses from all over the world will get an up close and personal look at the entrepreneurial spirit and resources of Kansas City. And the relationships that will open up for the Kansas City entrepreneurs who "think bigger" and decide to attend the event will have a lasting impact on our local economy and the city's future for years to come.

For more information about Futurallia 2010 or 2011, visit www.marc.org/international or listen to my radio interview with Joey Edgerton at www.iThinkBigger.com—just click on the radio archives.

We'll be attending Futurallia next year—will you?


(Publisher)

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