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By Alan Goforth, Special to The Star

Futurallia is coming to KC

The event will bring the world here next year for the “Olympics of entrepreneurship.”

By ALAN GOFORTH
Special to The Star

The concept behind Futurallia may be difficult to grasp at first, but Jo Anna Edgerton puts it in easy-to-understand terms.

“Futurallia is the Olympics of entrepreneurship,” said Edgerton, director of international affairs and trade development for the Mid-America Regional

Council.

The annual event brings together hundreds of entrepreneurs and small-business owners from as many as 40 countries. Each participant schedules 15 one-on-one meetings with entrepreneurs of their choice.

Jami Henry, president of Bellewether in Lee’s Summit, a management consulting company, attended Futurallia 2008 in Quebec. Her company, a business services consultancy, was looking for a partner to help de-

velop a new product.

“It was amazing to stand in a room with a thousand other entrepreneurs,” she said. “I met a gentleman who was from Quebec, and we connected. I had a business assessment tool, and he had the platform I needed on which to use it. We will launch our product together in May.”

Henry is one of several area businesspeople who plan to attend this year’s event, which is April 28-30 in Poitiers, France, where the Futurallia organiza-

tion is based.

Next year’s meeting will be more convenient — Kansas City has been selected as host city for Futurallia 2011, which will be May 18-20 at Bartle Hall.

“This will be the first time the event has been held in the United States,” Edgerton said. “We anticipate that it will attract at least 700 business leaders from around the world. Each of them will stay a minimum of three nights, so the economic impact will be in the millions.”

Local leaders worked hard to secure the event, she said.

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“The selection committee liked our central location, accessibility and affordability,” Edgerton said. “Because they are based in France, they also liked our wonderful French heritage and the large number of people who speak French here.”

Several key local industry sectors, such as agriculture, food and transportation, also are of interest to participants, she said.

The weather in April 2011 likely will be better than in December, when the site-selection committee visited.

Despite the snowy weather, the lights of the Country Club Plaza and the group’s name

spelled out electronically on the exterior of the Marriott Downtown helped win them over.

Translators will be needed for the event, and organizers also are seeking volunteers.

A dedicated Web site for Futurallia 2011 is being developed, but in the meantime, information is at www.marc.org/international.

Henry expects the exposure generated by the “entrepreneurial Olympics” to be invaluable.

“Being selected as the first host city in the United States will be a big benefit for Kansas City,” she said. “For a few days, we will be looked at by businesses from all over the world.”