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Couleecap announces new business incubator with grant from La Crosse Community Foundation

Couleecap today announced it is opening a new small business incubator to support entrepreneurship, economic vitality, and business diversity in the area. The program, funded in part by a three-year \$90,000 grant from the La Crosse Community Foundation, is designed to increase equity and stimulate the local economy by focusing on businesses owned by women, people of color, veterans and entrepreneurs starting with low incomes. The community is invited to help choose a logo and name the new venture.

Located at 320 Main Street in downtown La Crosse, the incubator offers eight to ten small businesses the opportunity to launch their business in a popular shopping district. The site will also host weekend and special pop-up events, so new products are regularly featured to the public. It's expected to open in late October, in time for the holiday shopping season.

"After seeing how successful collaborative pop-up shop programs were during the holiday season, we wanted to scale the model to be a year-round opportunity for entrepreneurs in the area," said Couleecap Community Development Director Ashley Lacenski.

Businesses wishing to rent space in the incubator can apply online at www.couleecap.org/retail.html. To keep the program low-barrier and low-risk, businesses will pay zero rent for the first three months and then rent will escalate every few months after that. Tenants will receive wrap-around business planning support, technical assistance, training referrals and other resources. In addition, Couleecap is partnering with the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiatives Corporation (WWBIC) to offer onsite learning courses and support for tenants and other businesses in the downtown area.

"We expect the incubator will strengthen the entire downtown small business economy. That's important to us as promoting small businesses means supporting working families, tourism and community reinvestment," added Lacenski.

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The La Crosse Community Foundation grant is helping to get the venture up and running.

"This project stands to be a win for everyone — for historically excluded local entrepreneurs, other downtown shop owners, future employees and the community's overall economic well-being," said La Crosse Community Foundation CEO Jamie Schloegel. "La Crosse Community Foundation is proud to support our community's next business owners with this transformational project."

Other funders include the city of La Crosse, Three-Sixty Real Estate, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and anonymous donors.

To kick off the small business incubator, Couleecap invites the public to help name the new venture. Through September 29, community members can visit the incubator to view a window display of proposed names and logos for the initiative and vote for their favorite through a QR Code posted on the window. The selected name and logo will be announced at a grand opening event when the incubator opens.

"This is all about community. A place where local entrepreneurs will launch or grow their businesses. It only makes sense that we ask our community to help us name it," says Lacenski.

To learn more about the small business incubator and rental terms, visit www.couleecap.org/retail.html.

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About Couleecap

Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501c3 charitable organization. Couleecap helps people in need with housing, food, transportation, and more. Created in 1966, we are a community action program that fights poverty and promotes self-sufficiency in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. Couleecap is a member of the Community Action Network, originally created in 1964. Learn more at couleecap.org.

About La Crosse Community Foundation

The La Crosse Community Foundation is a public charity created by and for the people of the La Crosse area. Since the foundation was established in 1930, it has awarded more than \$70 million in grants and scholarships. Through connecting people, passion and giving in the La Crosse area, the foundation is dedicated to being trusted stewards of the community's past and future assets.