

Communities and universities join forces at CUExpo 2011

Kitchener Record

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Date: May 7, 2011

Text Word Count: 398

Document Text

Universities have long been centres where the big questions are argued and researched.

How do we reduce homelessness? How do we make our environment sustainable?

But aside from inspiring the minds of graduates, how do these big ideas spread beyond scholarly journals?

The community-university partnership movement is afoot to bridge the gap between the world of academic research and the communities where the universities exist.

“Universities can be seen as having research expertise and communities have the knowledge and experience of what the real issues within the community are,” said Rich Janzen, of the Centre for Community Based Research.

“The hope is that as they come together they can come up with creative, innovative ways to improve or strengthen our local communities.”

Janzen is the research director for a community-university partnership expo that will be hosted at Wilfrid Laurier University next week.

CUExpo 2011 will showcase ongoing successful partnerships between universities and communities to bring “global perspectives to local action.”

This is the premiere forum around the partnerships of communities and universities in Canada, with 500 delegates attending from 16 different countries.

“There is a general trend toward seeing the university as a citizen that has resources that can be used for the betterment of our society,” Janzen said.

The movement around these partnerships has blossomed in the last decade, Janzen said. This allows educators participating in specialized research to work with community organizations who bring the local, real-world issues that need to be solved.

The event is led by the Centre for Community Based Research, a Kitchener-based research group that focuses on community-centred research, rather than that of scholarly journals or academic pursuits.

The expo runs May 10 to 14 and one-day registration is still available at \$210. Anyone interested in volunteering is encouraged to visit the website at www.cuexpo2011.ca.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health and University-Community Partnerships for Social Action Research are the other lead partners, while University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Guelph co-sponsor the event.

A Night in the Park — a community cultural fair — will run May 12 at Victoria Park with local theatre performances, music and multicultural food vendors and artisans.

The general public is invited to join with conference delegates. The event runs from 5:30 p.m. to sunset.