

10 MINUTES WITH...

Innovating at Ennovar

KENTON HANSEN LANDS IN THE TYPE OF APPLIED LEARNING HE LOVES



Kenton Hansen is about innovation and entrepreneurship.

KELLEN JENKINS / WBJ

Kenton Hansen is no stranger to entrepreneurship in Wichita. Hansen, who turned 34 this week, has been a prominent figure in the startup community for years.

And he isn't slowing down.

In November, he joined Ennovar at Wichita State University as software development director. It's an organization within the university that emphasizes emerging technologies and market solutions.

In addition, he is also among the organizers of the 1 Million Cups entrepreneurship series that recently began in Wichita.

Hansen is staying busy, but that's the best way to see where the next big idea will come from.

"I still get a good six or seven hours of sleep a night," he says.

What attracted you to the opportunity at Ennovar? Ennovar is all about applied learning. I have seen from experience that applied learning makes the difference between an employee that is ready to contribute and an

KENTON HANSEN

TITLE: Founder of The Labor Party, software development director at Ennovar at Wichita State University.

AGE: 34.

FAMILY: Wife, Lacy; son, Judah.

EXPERIENCE: Ennovar, November 2015 to present; Labor Party, 2010 to present; managing partner, Go Banana LLC, 2009 to 2015; creative conductor, Apples & Arrows, 2012 to 2013; partner, Thrive Business Solutions, 2006 to 2009; lead programmer, Automated Environments LLC, 2007 to 2009.

EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in business administration, Wichita State University.

employee that is not. I've experienced that in the software development. When the team at Ennovar approached me about teaming up, to me, it seemed like a worthy task and something I really, really cared about.

How would you describe the momentum at Ennovar? It's growing. We're getting ready to hire more staff, we're filling in those positions that the leadership team here needs to support the work that they're doing. And after just a year, we're at the point of burgeoning growth. It's going – and it's going fast. We have more work coming from local technology companies as well as national technology companies. It's an exciting time, for sure.

How has Ennovar been received by the surrounding business community? Overwhelmingly positive. It is clear to employers that have been in the industry for any amount of time that having a qualified work force and qualified employees is of the utmost importance. Right now, 100 percent

of graduating Ennovar students are getting job offers. It's been very well received. All of the partners that have started to work with us, the reason they have started to work with us is because of that potential to have well-trained employees. And that's the NIAR model, our big brother institute. And that whole idea of bringing training of a productive employee down from 18 months to six months, that's exactly where we're at as well.

How goes the 1 Million Cups program?

We've hit our stride as far attendance and people. And I feel like we're reaching the right kind of audience. Typically, the Kauffman Foundation recommends that you get three or four entrepreneurs as your founding organization team. We have 12. It's a good thing because it's put us at the cross section of a lot of different organizations and interested people. We're scheduled all the way out to May right now, and we have several approved speakers that we're just waiting on some scheduling conflicts to be resolved. My original concern (each event features two presenting entrepreneurs) of 52 weeks, times two, that's 104 – that's not going to be a problem.

What do you make of the growing overall push for entrepreneurship in Wichita? I think it's a broad direction ... but that's how it should be. Someone asked me about competition (among varying entrepreneurial initiatives), not at all. I mean, capitalism is based on competition. And honestly, I don't feel like there is real competition right now. No one is trying to take anyone else's anything. It's just different directions that people are approaching the entrepreneurial question with.

What entrepreneurial advice would you go back and give yourself? I hate buzzwords now more than I ever have before, and if you over-use any word it becomes that. So, be careful what words you use. And, failure is not a big deal. If you're not failing you're not trying.

– Daniel McCoy