

# Meeting the demand: Ashland Young Professionals group kicks off Thursday night

By Kristi Schweitzer / Staff Writer

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Angela Ringler and Jake Coffy pose for a photo at Downtown Perk. They have been the two people responsible for starting the Ashland Young Business Professionals group, which has its first meeting Thursday. - Tom E. Puskar, [Times-Gazette.com](http://Times-Gazette.com)



When Ashlanders Jake Coffy and Angela Ringler got together last summer, they wanted to explore the idea of starting a group to connect and educate young professionals like themselves in the community. Now, thanks to the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce, **Ashland County Community Foundation** and a core team of dedicated, passionate young professionals, that dream was become a reality.

Ashland Young Professionals, a group devoted to grow and equip the next generation, officially kicks off Thursday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Mitchell's Orchard and Farm. Anyone ages 21 through 40 is welcome to join in the free event to make connections and learn what is in store for this new group. Drinks and hors d'oeuvres will be available, accompanied by live music from Kruman Lemon Music: Along for the Ride and Tom's Kitchen Table.

"The purpose (of AYP) is to connect and educate young professionals in the Ashland area to build a bright future," said Coffy, the group's president. AYP is meant to connect young professionals to each other and to older generations, said Ringler, vice president. "Essentially, we understand nothing can happen without relationships being formed first, so we want to connect these generations of people," Ringler said.

AYP's structure is based around events — whether social, educational or community engagement events. "Part of that is connecting with the community because a lot of people in the AYP range might not know how to connect with the community and what's going on, so we're hoping to bridge that gap," Coffy said.

Meeting the demand, the group seeks to fulfill the void left when the Chamber's Gen X group phased out in 2016, but with a new vision and purpose. When the two approached the Chamber in June, they quickly discovered they were not alone in this desire for change. Through word of mouth a core team was gathered of young professionals including Kelly Cooke, community engagement; Ben Schnell, marketing; Melanie Fitch, secretary; Sarah Rader, finance; Beau Carpenter, treasurer; and Zane Stepp, events.

Not only gaining traction within the community through Facebook and word of mouth, AYP has the support of the **Ashland County Community Foundation**, which has pledged seed money for events. "ACCF provided a \$4,300 grant as seed money to kickstart this effort, as we feel it's a really important piece of moving Ashland forward, if we want to attract and retain youthful leadership in

our community,” said Jim Cutright, ACCF executive director. “We’ve challenged them to not just build a social network, but to create a voice for change.”

After Thursday, the group plans to finalize upcoming events, which will be found on [ashlandyp.com](http://ashlandyp.com) and Ashland Young Professionals Facebook page. The first few events will be social-based to make connections but the group plans to have educational events, including speakers and volunteer events to provide opportunities to give back to the community.

Thanks to ACCF, events will range from free to \$10. Membership is casual, no strings attached for now as the group is forming, Coffy and Ringler said. The next event will be a social gathering March 19 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Tin Can Chandelier.

In the future, AYP hopes to develop mentorship programs to strengthen relations between younger and older business professionals. In addition to forming connections, a big goal for AYP is to attract and retain.

“We don’t want people leaving Ashland because Ashland’s awesome, so ... we think by building those relationships we can help keep them here. It is a really cool thought,” Coffy said.

“There’s a conception that we don’t want to stay in Ashland ... but there are a large group of us that are committed to staying here and making it better and making this an even better place to live,” Ringler said. “It’s a good place to live now but (we want) to keep improving and growing and making it better.”

Ringler, the president of Advantage Marketing, has been working her way up through the company since she joined after college. An Ashland native, she attended St. Edward School and graduated from Ashland High School in 2006 before graduating from Kent State University in 2009.

Likewise, Coffy worked his way up through several area jobs before joining the Chamber in 2017 as the member relations and administrative coordinator. Born and raised in Ashland, he attended Ashland Christian School before graduating from Ashland High School in 2015. After graduation, he took a job painting for his father’s company, Enhanced Homes Painting, before working for his older brother at Flight Media as a digital market designer. During his time at Flight Media he took a four-month trip across the Appalachian Trail, which he likes to call his higher education. “It was that journey that helped me realize, again, when I got back, what I felt like I was called to do in life,” Coffy said. “I felt like God called me to stay here in this community and build it.”

To stay in touch with the happenings of AYP visit [ashlandyp.com](http://ashlandyp.com) or follow them on Facebook and Instagram at [@ashland.yip](https://www.instagram.com/ashland.yip).

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