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Experts at Detroit conference share investment advice

BY BRIAN J. O'CONNOR

A dozen Wall Street heavy-hitters and one Federal Reserve bank president will dispense investment analysis and market updates at a two-day conference aimed at students and professionals.

Sponsored by Mainstay Capital Management of Grand Blanc and Wayne State University, the ENGAGE International Investment Education Symposium expects to attract 1,500 to 2,500 people to Cobo Center March 26-27, says Mainstay Capital CEO David Kudla.

"If you look at the content of the first day and the presenters, that's as good as you'll see at any professional conference," Kudla says. In addition to students, the conference is aimed at individual investors and professionals, and even offers required continuing education credits to Certified Financial Planners and other investment professionals.

ENGAGE is expected to be the largest student investment conference of the year, and grows out of Kudla's experience organizing similar big student financial symposiums for the past two years at the University of Dayton.

"This will include students from all over the United States and Canada, and Europe," Kudla says. "We have nearly 30 states represented. This is something I like to do to give back."

The conference will feature an address from Dennis Lockhart, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, who will be interviewed by Steve Liesman, economics reporter for CNBC. Panels will discuss the global economy, the state of the financial industry, and domestic and international markets. Panelists include Bill Miller, portfolio manager for the Legg Mason Opportunity Trust mutual fund;

Scott Powers, CEO of State Street Global Advisors; Mellody Hobson, president of Chicago-based money management firm Ariel Investments; and Stephanie Link, who leads all investment, research and contributor recruitment activities at TheStreet.com.

Most professionals are donating their own time and covering the bulk of their expenses for the nonprofit event, Kudla noted.

The conference will also include a student investment portfolio competition, to see which investment group posted the best result for 2014, based on on risk adjusted return. Also on the schedule are two student pitch competition segments, where students make their best effort to present recommendations for a specific investment to a panel of professionals.

"It's like selling a business idea," Kudla explained. "It's as if they were in front of an investment committee pitching a security for an investment. It's about the quality of the analysis and presentation. This is how a lot of firms do it, as well. The students love it because it all happens right there."

The conference will also be featured live from noon to 1 p.m. on the March 27th edition of CNBC's "Fast Money Halftime Report" show.

Registration for the conference ends March 15.