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TODAY'S WEATHER



HIGH
66

LOW
51

An unsettled weather pattern is returning. Friday will be in the upper 60s with on-and-off showers and storms.

Complete forecast on page 7

THINGS ARE LOOKING UP

County business officials say economic conditions are promising

By KATIE FINLON
kfinlon@shawmedia.com

DeKALB – DeKalb County economic officials said during the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp.’s State of the County presentation Thursday night that unemployment rates are at a historic low in the county.

DCEDC Executive Director Paul Borek said continued investment and significant job creation in the county reduced unemployment to 4 percent, which is the lowest level the county has seen since before the Great Recession.

Borek said the tightening labor conditions are requiring the organization to address employers’ needs for workers, which will require an initiative to diversify the county’s industrial space and to promote the business potential and talent of area university and community college students.

“We’ve had considerable success, but we can achieve so much more,” Borek said.

About 250 representatives from about 50 businesses throughout the county, along with local government officials, gathered for the 31st annual dinner and presentations at Faranda’s, 302 Grove St. Jason Dickinson, director for supply chain operations for 3M Corp., was this year’s keynote speaker.

Dickinson said the 3M distribution center in DeKalb is the largest one in the world, employing about 950 people – many of whom live in the county. From what the company has seen in the about 30 years the distribution center has been in operation, he said, company leaders have been happy with the center’s success, which he attributes to talent coming from nearby schools and from local workers having strong work ethics.

“Obviously, the state of Illinois has its challenges, and everybody knows that, but from a 3M perspective, we’re extremely happy with where we’re at within DeKalb County,” Dickinson said.

Borek said the county has had three straight years of averaging \$100 million in capital investment. He said job creation has averaged about 800 new jobs a year in the past few years, as well.

Borek noted some specific projects that contributed to the county’s economic growth in the past year, including the completion of the DeKalb County Jail expansion and the approval of a four-story hotel on the corner of South Annie Glidden Road and Knolls



Jason Dickinson, director of supply chain operations for 3M Corp., waits to deliver the keynote address at the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp.’s annual dinner Thursday at Faranda’s in DeKalb.

Photos by Mary Beth Nolan for Shaw Media

Avenue. He also acknowledged residential projects such as Cornerstone DeKalb, saying that kind of development has become more important than ever with the increased labor force in the county.

DeKalb County Board Chairman Mark Pietrowski Jr. said the county’s economic climate seems to have had steady growth lately, given the number of businesses that have taken advantage of the county’s enterprise zone and with the recent establishment of an opportunity zone for Northern Illinois University. An opportunity zone is defined as an “economically distressed community where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment,” according to the Internal Revenue Service.

Pietrowski said the county also has seen a lot of solar and wind energy companies showing interest in the county.

“We’d love to bring different industries out here,” Pietrowski said.

Borek said the enterprise zone was a



DCEDC Executive Director Paul Borek speaks about business highlights during his State of the County presentation Thursday.

major business climate asset, bringing in 26 projects that generated \$67 million of investment since the zone was certified in 2016. He said 10 of those projects were commercial, and 12 were manufacturing and industrial projects.

Dickinson said the low employment

rate in the past couple of years has made it a little harder for 3M to find workers sometimes. But, he said, he’s happy to see the business growth in the area in the past year.

“It’s great to see DeKalb County prosper,” Dickinson said.