

Strategic plan aims to grow county economy

The DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation approved the DeKalb County Thriving! Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy at its June quarterly board meeting. The plan presents a comprehensive blueprint for economic development prepared by business and community leaders.

The CEDS plan analyzes the county's strengths and opportunities to expand the local economy by capitalizing on our strengths while mitigating any barriers. The planning process included research, surveys, visioning and deliberation by stakeholders, including community and government leaders, residents and businesses.

The CEDS plan was co-sponsored by DeKalb County government, the DeKalb County Community Foundation, the Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies, the DeKalb County Farm Bureau and the DCEDC. These partnering organizations, each with a stake in the economic vitality of DeKalb County, launched a process to develop a countywide economic development vision and priorities in 2015.

After a kickoff summit, all 14 municipalities in DeKalb County were invited to participate in developing the county's economic development vision and priority areas. Participation options included:

- One-on-one interviews with elected and appointed officials, business leaders, employees, students,



**DCEDC
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and/or residents.

- Facilitated town hall-style community forums to understand each community's economic development assets, needs, opportunities and resources.

- A countywide electronic survey open to anyone who lived, worked or attended school in DeKalb County.

After collecting input from across the county, a vision statement was created that highlighted DeKalb County's greatest assets: "People + Place + Partnership Make DeKalb County Thrive!" Six asset-based priorities emerged from the visioning process: 1. Developing local leadership; 2. Helping connect people to jobs; 3. Retaining, expanding and attracting business; 4. Improving infrastructure; 5. Supporting community economic planning and coordination; 6. Identifying and pursuing funding opportunities.

Building on this initial community visioning phase, the partners convened a CEDS Planning Committee of business and community leaders from the DCEDC Board of Directors to create and implement the CEDS plan. The resulting plan consists of five economic development goals and 20 implementation strategies. These five goals are:

Goal 1: Ensure DeKalb County has a talent pipeline that meets the needs of workers and employers.

Goal 2: Identify and recruit target industries.

Goal 3: Create a countywide business climate in DeKalb County that contributes to business success.

Goal 4: Brand and promote the "DeKalb County Experience" that focuses on the county's unique assets and strategies.

Goal 5: Collaborate countywide to maximize the economic health of all communities in DeKalb County.

Strategies for implementing each of the five goals include:

- Addressing the skills and employment needs of businesses, institutions and workers by strengthening relationships with employers, educators and employment agencies.

- Creating jobs and expanding the tax base by recruiting innovative manufacturing, logistics and distribution, research and technology, and agriculture/food processing.

- Improving the business climate by streamlining regulations and providing economic development training for local officials.

- Branding the county's distinctive entrepreneurship, innovation, arts, culture and entertainment.

- Strengthening the economy throughout the county by collaborating in the promotion of opportunities and activities in all communities.

The NIU Center for Governmental

Studies facilitated the planning process, provided data and research to the DCEDC Planning Advisory Committee team and wrote the CEDS plan based on feedback gathered at three CEDS planning sessions and follow-up action planning sessions with the CEDS Planning Committee.

This plan combines the efforts of DeKalb County government with 14 municipalities; business and industry; education, health care and philanthropic institutions; and chambers of commerce and business associations. The purpose of the effort is to attract investment, jobs and tax base by promoting ingenuity and innovation. Planning Committee members are confident that execution of this plan will strengthen the economy and increase the competitiveness of DeKalb County.

Implementation of the CEDS plan has begun. The DCEDC has convened five working groups to create action plans further developing strategies, creating timelines and identifying outside resources that may be required. The implementation process will serve as a unifying force in the county by bringing together communities, companies, government agencies, educational institutions and community organizations to work together on a shared vision for economic growth.

• *Paul Borek is executive director of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp.*

Sycamore Chamber celebrates law office



Photo provided

The Sycamore Chamber Ambassadors recently hosted a ribbon-cutting to celebrate the new location of the Law Office of Riley N. Oncken. The office is now at 212 S. Main St. in Sycamore. The office is a full-service law firm, offering representation to clients in DeKalb County and the surrounding counties in northern Illinois. For information, call 815-991-2098.

Park district dedicates Splash Fountain



Photo provided

On June 12, the Sycamore Kiwanis Club and First Midwest Bank, sponsors of the Sycamore Park District Splash Fountain, conducted a ribbon-cutting to dedicate the facility. Both have a long history of giving back to Sycamore through their support of the park district. They were joined by park district board and staff members. The facility opened May 26 and since has seen a steady flow of daily users. Splash Fountain is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. The entry fee is \$2 for residents and \$4 for nonresidents.