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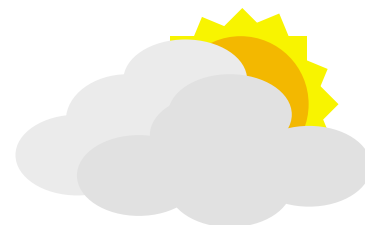
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Good morning, DeKalb County ...

Ferrara coming to DeKalb in part because of programs sponsored by local state Reps.

It's no secret that our state has not been friendly to workers and businesses, small and large. Illinois has been consistently ranked as one of the worst states to start or grow a business, partially because of rising taxes and increasingly burdensome regulations. That may partially explain why our state continues to lose population, but we're here to tell you there is real, meaningful economic development happening right here in our communities.

Consider the "Project Hammer" announcement made Jan 31. The Ferrara Candy Co., a global candy manufacturer headquartered in Chicago, announced its plan to relocate and expand its Illinois operations to DeKalb, and with it, adding 500 new jobs to our local economy in the first phase of its investment, with the potential for at least 500 more in the very near future. Ferrara is on a fast timetable, too. It plans to be fully operational by the second quarter of 2021.

Now, why would a multibillion-dollar manufacturer choose DeKalb over a city in Wisconsin, a neighboring state that's commonly considered to be more business-friendly than Illinois?

We know our area is home to a highly skilled workforce, great educational institutions such as Northern Illinois University and great road and rail infrastructure, but what brought DeKalb over the finish line?

The answer? The hard work of DeKalb city and county officials who were empowered with several economic development tools, including new tools such as the historic capital program and House Republican-sponsored, job-creating reforms, helped bring these new jobs to DeKalb.



VIEWS

Tom Demmer



VIEWS

Jeff Keicher

The capital program invests about \$45 billion in our state's infrastructure over the next six years, and a significant amount of those funds will go to projects in our area. Without a doubt, those funds, including specific initiatives we sponsored, already are helping facilitate economic development locally. The capital program funds a portion of the road infrastructure projects immediately surrounding Ferrara's project site at the Chicago West Business Center.

And the pro-business reforms – the Blue Collar Jobs Act, reinstatement of the Manufacturer's Purchase Credit, repeal of the Franchise Tax and more – are encouraging Ferrara and other businesses to make major financial investments in our state. Those reforms exist today thanks to the persistence of House Republicans in negotiations over the budget and capital program. We would not have supported either of those measures unless Democrats agreed to significant job-creating reforms, something our state has not seen for quite some time. To their credit, Gov. JB Pritzker and Democrats in the majority agreed and signed off on our job-creating reforms.

Most importantly, we'd like to recognize

all of the work state and local officials did in securing this project. Paul Borek of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp., DeKalb City Manager Bill Nicklas and DeKalb Mayor Jerry Smith did a fantastic job showcasing DeKalb as the ideal location for this major investment. Without a doubt, their efforts amount to the lion's share of the work it took to secure these new jobs. Staff at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity were greatly supportive, as well.

Despite a lack of progress on many pressing issues facing our state, bipartisanship, compromise and the diligence and hard work of local officials resulted in 1,000 new jobs for the people of DeKalb, with the potential for more to come. That is something to celebrate, even if you are dissatisfied, as we are, in the current condition of our state. Only one new job has the potential to transform a life and a community. That's why creating new, good-paying jobs is one of our top priorities.

This year, let's build on that bipartisan progress to enact additional job-creating reforms so we can empower local officials with even more tools to attract even more investments. It is our hope that both parties – Republicans and Democrats – will come together, compromise and enact long-overdue reforms to grow our communities and our state. The people of Illinois deserve nothing less, and the future of our state depends on it.

• *State Reps. Jeff Keicher, R-Sycamore, and Tom Demmer, R-Dixon, represent the 70th and 90th Districts, respectively, in the Illinois House of Representatives.*

LOCAL BRIEF

DeKalb High School a cappella group headed to Milwaukee

DeKALB – DeKalb High School's a cappella group, Enharmonic Fusion, is in the running for the 2020 International Championship of High School A Cappella Finals in New York City.

But first the group is headed to the Great Lakes semifinal at The Pabst Theater in

Milwaukee, and the winner will get to go to New York on March 21. The group won the quarterfinals Jan. 25.

The semifinal is set for 7 to 10 p.m. March 21 at The Pabst Theater, 144 E. Wells St. in Milwaukee, and will pit DeKalb against a cappella groups from Niles West High School in Skokie; Lockport Township High School in Lockport; Grafton High School in

Grafton, Wisconsin; Brookfield East High School in Brookfield, Wisconsin; and Oak Creek High School in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

DeKalb High School, 501 W. Dresser Road, will host the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella Quarterfinals, set for 7 to 10:30 p.m. Feb. 22 in the high school auditorium.

– Daily Chronicle

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CORRECTIONS

Accuracy is important to the Daily Chronicle, and we want to correct mistakes promptly. Please call errors to our attention by phone, 815-756-4841, ext. 2257; email, news@daily-chronicle.com; or fax, 815-758-5059.

ON THE COVER

An excavator loads a truck with dirt as work continues Friday at the ChicagoWest Business Center in DeKalb in preparation the Ferrara Candy Co.'s arrival. See story on page 3.

Photo by Mark Busch – mbusch@shawmedia.com

DeKalb County growing jobs

Ferrara Candy Co., Meijer are looking to fill hundreds of positions

By **KELSEY RETTKE**
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DeKALB – DeKalb County is set to undergo a significant job boom over the next year, with Chicago-based candy manufacturer Ferrara Candy Co. headed to DeKalb's south side and a retailer headed to Sycamore, each bringing hundreds of jobs.

DeKalb Mayor Jerry Smith called Ferrara's confirmation a "catalyst for even further economic development."

"Not only in that vicinity, but all of those things that jobs and an added number of folks living and shopping in the area is going to mean," Smith said.

Grand Rapids, Michigan-based retailer Meijer will open its doors in Sycamore near the intersection of Peace Road and Route 23 sometime in the spring. The big-box retailer has announced it is looking to fill 300 jobs.

It's a time where smaller businesses are trying to get in on the momentum, too.

A not-yet-announced knowledge-based company also is interested in DeKalb's south side and could bring 100 to 200 high-paying technology jobs.

Ferrara, known in the U.S. for making items such as Lemonhead, Trolli, Nerds and Red Hots, will invest \$100 million in a 1.6 million-square-foot distribution center and 466,000 square-foot food packaging center that will sit on the 343-acre site between Route 23 and Gurler Road known as ChicagoWest Business Center.

Although the types of jobs Ferrara will offer isn't yet clear – and Sarah Kittel, head of corporate affairs at Ferrara, did not respond to requests for comment when asked about job specifics and hiring metrics – it is expected the company will have the first 500 filled by the time the distribution center is operational. Another 500 will staff the packing center, and there are about 1,000 temporary construction jobs.

DeKalb City Manager Bill Nicklas said he didn't know job specifics but believes the company is set to be ready in about a year.

"They want to be up and running in the distribution center around March of 2021," Nicklas said. "The building construction is about a yearlong process, and the weather will dictate if there can be faster progress or delays."

Job growth in DeKalb County

Since 2017, more than 800 jobs have



Photos by Mark Busch – mbusch@shawmedia.com

Cement trucks get hosed off after delivering the cargo Friday at the ChicagoWest Business Center in DeKalb in preparation for the arrival of the Ferrara Candy Co.

been created in the county, according to numbers from the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp., and more than \$140 million has been invested into the community. The DeKalb County labor market includes more than 611,000 workers within a 40-mile radius, according to dcedc.org.

The U.S. Labor Department said Friday that employers added 225,000 jobs in January. At the same time, a half-million Americans, feeling better about their job prospects, streamed into the job market. Most found jobs. But those who didn't were newly counted as unemployed, and their numbers raised the jobless rate to 3.6% from December's half-century low of 3.5%.

"It's huge when you can inject that many quality jobs into the marketplace," DeKalb County Board Chairman Mark Pietrowski said when the Ferrara announcement was made. "When we established these different economic programs that were meant to bring in and attract quality companies, this was the goal."



An excavator moves dirt Mark Busch Friday at the ChicagoWest Business Center in DeKalb.

Ferrara's website does not yet list any job openings in DeKalb.

A look at Ferrara's extensive job postings for various sites in Bellwood, Chicago, Itasca and Bolingbrook, and facilities in Kentucky, Georgia and Michigan, shows an array of multi-level positions including manufacturing and administration.

Although no pay is listed on the Ferrara website job postings, there is a range of positions open from senior

manager of consumer insights and manufacturing project manager to machinist, production lead, material handler, food production laborer and janitor.

On Friday, bulldozers could be seen at the site. Nicklas said construction on footing and foundation for the Ferrara distribution center began Jan. 6.

• *The Associated Press contributed to this report.*