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A strategy for community prosperity



VIEWS

**Paul
Borek**

Facebook, Ferrara Candy and Syn-genta have announced plans or begun construction of 2.6 million square feet of development on 700 acres of land valued at nearly \$1 billion creating 700 jobs.

These developments will impact host communities and townships by creating career jobs and generating significant property tax revenue. However, these developments alone will not transform the DeKalb County economy and improve prosperity and the quality of life for residents.

To sustain business attraction throughout DeKalb County, we need to promote business assets and communicate our successes across the region, state and nation. To ensure the success of new and established businesses, we need to attract young people, students, professionals and entrepreneurs to live, buy homes, raise families and start businesses in DeKalb County.

During the past decade, DeKalb County has lost population in the 18 - 34 age group (-2.4%) and the 35 - 49 age group (-7.4%). To reverse these trends, we need to recognize what makes DeKalb County attractive to current residents and communicate these attributes to the marketplace.

With the support of the DeKalb County Community Foundation, DCEDC contracted with DCC Marketing to develop a brand positioning, creative, messaging and marketing strategy for that will: recruit businesses to locate to DeKalb County from strong and growing industry sectors and to increase population of young professionals and families. Targeted industries include agriculture, food processing, technology-based companies and research & development in partnership with NIU.

Extensive grassroots, community, business and leadership focus groups contributed to brand development. Most agreed that one of DeKalb County's challenges is a lack of identify. Nonetheless, these residents expressed that they

choose to live in DeKalb County and aren't going anywhere because of strong quality of life attributes including affordable housing, convenient commute to work, employment opportunities, safe communities and quality education systems.

When asked to characterize DeKalb County with key words, the most common response was "opportunity." When asked to elaborate, respondents expressed that there was no limit to what could be achieved.

Hence, the word "unbound" acknowledges that while DeKalb has always had a lot to offer, we're taking it to the next level. It connotes a feeling of adventure, excitement and optimism about what's to come, all of which are appealing to the target audience of young professionals and families.

The brand "Opportunity Unbound" provides a set-up to talk about lesser known aspects of the county and to promote new initiatives. DeKalb County is a growing, vibrant community where residents and businesses flourish. The county's unique location and talented workforce attracts top-tier international corporations and provides residents abundant opportunity to excel in one of many growing sectors. With affordable housing, quality healthcare and exceptional education, DeKalb County is truly a place to "live, work, play and repeat."

The mission of the branding initiative for DeKalb County is to create a countywide collaborative business climate that delivers a consistent message and narrative which contributes to business and population growth.

"A thoughtfully-developed brand and consistently-executed marketing plan are necessary to ensure future success," according to the Opportunity Unbound Branding Playbook. "The responsibility and authority to steward the marketing activities through a collaborative, strategic and long-term effort must be embodied in a County Marketing Manager."

The Opportunity Unbound branding strategy specifies how to reach target audiences, such as prospective businesses and corporations through LinkedIn, and community organizations,

workers and people in surrounding counties through Facebook and YouTube. Tactics also include brand ambassadors, news and radio, fliers and collateral, promotional signage, public relations, website, digital marketing and advertising, video and organic social media.

Sample messaging for business would be: "Land of opportunity. That's got a nice ring to it. Shovel-ready development sites with preapproved incentives, extensive supplier networks, easy access to Chicago and Mid-American markets and a skilled workforce ready to boost your bottom line. We don't know what kind of list you have, but we're pretty sure that ticks all the boxes. Whatever you're looking for, you'll find it here in DeKalb County."

For prospective and current residents: "We get it. You want affordable housing, good schools, access to quality healthcare. Job opportunities in a growing local economy and access to modern amenities without losing that small-town charm. An environment where you can truly live, work and play. What if we told you there's all that and more in DeKalb County? That sounds like a homerun to us, but we're biased."

For prospective visitors: "Some may say there is nothing to do here, but they couldn't be more wrong. You see, in DeKalb County, we believe only boring people get bored. Microbreweries, farm-to-table dining, art, antiques, orchards galore. We've got all the buzzwords. What more could you really want? So, get out there. Leave no stone unturned, no festival unattended. It's an adventure if you make it."

To execute the plan, DCEDC is meeting with business and community leadership to generate funding required to hire a County Marketing Manager, prepare collateral and fund the diversified advertising and promotional campaign

To review the Opportunity Unbound Branding Playbook and watch a podcast presentation on the branding strategy, please visit www.dcedc.org.

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

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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, 815-526-4565; email, news@daily-chronicle.com.

ON THE COVER

Anthony and Lyndsey Podyma were married at Chapel in the Pines Wedding & Banquet Center on Aug. 28.

See story on page 3.

Photo provided



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