

KANDIYOHU COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)

MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

August 27, 2018

WORKUP, Willmar

Present: Kim Augeson, Donna Boonstra, Deb Geister, Emily Lien, Pam Rosenau, Joanna Schrupp and Brittany VanDerBill

Excused: Shari Courtney and Melissa Knott

Absent: Jean Geselius

Guest: Jayme Sczublewski, REDstar Creative

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director; Connie Schmoll, Business Development Specialist and Thor Figenkau, Summer Intern

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (*LAA*)

Chair Deb Geister called the meeting to order at approximately 12:02 p.m.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Brittany VanDerBill, SECONDED BY Joanna Schrupp, to approve the Minutes of the May 29 and June 25, 2018 meetings. MOTION CARRIED.

Social Media Statistics. The committee reviewed the EDC's Facebook statistics over the past month: 27 posts (down 12%), post reach 13.2k (up 51%), impressions 21.2k (up 52%), clicks 71 (up 2%), reactions 186 (down 16%), engaged users 772 (up 18%), page and post engagements 1,165 (up 7%) and new fans 21 (up 250%). The top posts in the past month were:

1. Opening of Kwik Trip—clicks 172, reactions 14, shares 23, impressions 6,040, reach 3,504
2. Plans underway for redevelopment for First Street Station—clicks 408, reactions 5, comments 5, shares 1, impressions 6,040, reach 1,013
3. Primary candidates for Willmar mayor—clicks 80, reactions 3, comments 1, shares 1, impressions 709, reach 471
4. “The Buzz” by Willmar City Planner re Midtown Plaza—clicks 14, reactions 2, shares 1, impressions 669, reach 397
5. Chamber of Commerce workshop on new tool for job seekers and employers—clicks 19, reactions 2, shares 3, impressions 617, reach 371

Followers increased from 457 to 478 in August. The EDC's LinkedIn page is also slowly growing with business focused articles. Chair Geister requested REDstar provide a demographic report on the EDC's followers for next month. Jayme Sczublewski stated REDstar has not been doing very many posts to the Highway 23 Facebook page.

Ag Talent & Technology Workshop. Connie Schmoll thanked REDstar for its work in marketing for the Ag Talent & Technology workshop. Thor Figenskau boosted the Facebook posts. It was interesting to see that the posts were read by more women than men and that most viewers saw the posts from their cell phones. The response to the marketing was good and 59 people attended the workshop. The Ag Marketing Subcommittee met and recommended changes for future workshops, including adding a phone number to call to register (in addition to an online link) and have a set registration and breakfast time to allow for networking. The speakers were good and the feedback was excellent. Attendees were a good cross section of farmers, lenders and ag-related businesses. One topic was on the use of drones. Chair Geister recommended doing an article on drones in the next newsletter.

Schmoll reported the EDC will be co-hosting with the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce (WLACC) a workshop on foreign trade and tariffs on September 20th. Representatives from the Canadian Consulate and U. S. Trade Office will speak. WLACC is doing the marketing for the event.

[Kim Augeson joined the meeting.]

Highway 23 Coalition. Backman gave an update on the Highway 23 Coalition 2019 membership drive, including the extension of memberships beyond Marshall and St. Cloud. Backman is looking for a 90% renewal by business members. The new focus for the Coalition will be the length of the corridor across the state. Schmoll provided information on conversations with Duluth representatives as to membership. Backman has suggested a tag line for the Coalition “anchored in greater Minnesota.” Chair Geister asked if a representative from this committee should be on the Coalition’s Marketing Committee. Backman and Schmoll recommended this committee’s representation. The next Coalition Marketing Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for September 13th at the West Central Tribune. Jayme Sczublewski and Chair Geister will attend. The current membership is 94. Schmoll noted Highway 23 is important to West Central Steel. Chair Geiser recommended using West Central Steel as a testimonial on the Highway 23 website.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Business in Focus. The committee viewed the article and ad published in the August 2018 *Business in Focus* magazine, which included #KanDo hashtag developed by Vision 2040 (see attached). The ad was a partnership between the EDC, Willmar Municipal Utilities and the City of Willmar. Sczublewski stated REDstar will use excerpts from the article in upcoming Facebook posts. Backman stated Duinincks and Prinsco placed ads in the magazine.

NEW BUSINESS—

IMPACT Magazine Ad. Backman reported an ad will be placed in the new *IMPACT* magazine at an approximate cost of \$600. Schmoll reported the last magazine featured agriculture and was well received. This year’s theme is unknown.

Fall Newsletter Topics/Ideas. Sczublewski reported the newsletters have had about four to five articles written by Backman and Schmoll. Potential topics for the fall newsletter have been the Talent & Technology workshop, including the drone technology; familiarization (FAM) tour in Chicago;

Highway 23 Coalition update; 2018 goals, one of which is childcare; and the opening of Kwik Trip. The goal is to email the newsletter by late September.

FAM Tour. Schmoll reported last week she attended a FAM tour in Chicago for site selectors. Minnesota Marketing Partnership, a division of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, hosted the tour. Schmoll distributed the EDC's flyers on the Willmar Industrial Park and MinnWest Technology Campus and made several contacts with business representatives and international trade office representatives. She noted it was one of the best tours she has attended. Minnesota's workforce, and Willmar's, were featured. Schmoll stated the personal contact was more valuable than some advertising.

Education Flyer. The committee reviewed a draft education flyer prepared by Thor Figenskau. Figenskau interviewed school superintendents and principals to gather updated information. The format of the flyer would be similar to the EDC's other flyers. Information Figenskau feels is important for each school is in bold. Committee members suggested the following changes:

- obtain and use photos from the schools rather than their logos;
- only highlight the Willmar campus of Ridgewater College, not Hutchinson campus;
- if statistics relative to the Customized and Continuing Education Program are used, CCE needs to be defined;
- include ACGC and MACCRAY as they have schools within the county;
- do not use any acronyms, such as PSEO, ASEI and KCEO and, if used, they should be defined;
- condense the information to what interests people;
- add a paragraph on why education in the county is important;
- include a map of the county with arrows to each school district;
- add each school's website addresses;
- in the opening paragraph, put all of the common items as a general statement rather than under each school;
- include technology features for each school (how do they integrate technology), such as Smart Boards, iPads, etc.
- focus on academics, athletics and arts plus student ratio;
- the flyer should state why the schools are good and why each should be considered and give the options of each—possibly create an online grid of the various categories to checkoff and interested parties could download the information they want.

Backman stated the intended audience is business and workforce recruiters. The committee suggested this flyer may be more beneficial for inclusion in a welcome packet done by the Chamber and did not believe it would be used by the schools. Kim Augeson noted she, personally, would want to know the statistics about each school and why her kids should attend a particular school. Joanna Schrupp suggested business CEOs would contact the schools directly. The committee would be interested to see what Carris Health/ACMC Health gives to doctors they are recruiting.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:10 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **12 noon, Tuesday, September 24, 2018**, at WORKUP.

That #KanDo Mentality That Can Only Mean Success

For almost 15 years, the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC) has been working hard to serve as a catalyst for economic growth in its region. In 2017, Business in Focus took a closer look at this dynamic organization and all of the great initiatives the EDC was working on in partnership with other sectors to make the City and County a vibrant and attractive place to live and do business.



Written by Stacey McCarthy

Now, #KanDo is the new Vision 2040 hashtag to bring attention to events in the Willmar Lakes Area this summer; #KanDo for business and economic development supports the success of the Kandiyohi County area.

A quick snapshot of the region shows that the City of Willmar itself, which represents about 48 percent of the population of

Kandiyohi County, recently passed the 20,000 population mark for the first time. The city's population has also become more diverse, with over 21 percent Latino and six percent East African residents.

Willmar also represents about 70 percent of the jobs and payroll in the county, and 1800 of those jobs were added in the past five years. Over 90 percent of those new jobs are ■

based in Willmar, and all of them have meant an impact on the housing market. There is only a 2.8 percent vacancy rate for rental housing.

The EDC uses the slogan "Open for Business" as a means of inviting prospective companies to come and take a look at all that it has to offer. It has been a successful campaign that resulted in many development projects being launched. When we spoke with them one year later, what we found is that many of those projects are now in fact "open for business."

Some of these projects include the new 600-student Lakeland Elementary School; the 29,000 square foot Carris Health Surgery Center; Schwieters Chevrolet of Willmar car dealership; West Central Steel's new 85,000 square foot facility; and the Little Crow Resort, a newly constructed \$7.8 million facility that opened this past June. This resort is in fact poised to be a great year-round destination with 51 hotel rooms, a 300-seat convention center, a 75-seat restaurant, and a golf course.



Little Crow Resort



Lakeland Elementary School



Schwieters Chevrolet of Willmar



West Central Steel

These projects, in conjunction with others, have resulted in just under \$103 million in permit value for construction for the county, a 22 percent increase over the previous two years.

This year, the growth continues with new projects, including Urban Escape Boutique, an \$865,000 retail project in Spicer; the \$400,000 Midtown Plaza – a diverse business center which opened in January; and three new Kwik Trip convenience stores and gas stations. The EDC is also working with CBRE Group Inc., a worldwide commercial real estate company that is working with a prospect considering a new 100,000 square foot logistics facility.

The major employers in the region remain constant, including Jennie-O, which employs over 1,600 people and the newly-formed Carris Health, the result of a partnership between Rice Memorial Hospital, CentraCare Health and ACMC Health. These three facilities deliver healthcare to West Central and Southwest Minnesota, and employ over 2,000 people.

"While the EDC is pleased with the overall growth in Kandiyohi County, it is concerned about commodity prices affecting the agricultural sector."

Prosperity, however, often goes hand in hand with challenges, and while the EDC is pleased with the overall growth in Kandiyohi County, it is concerned about the agricultural sector and the impact that low commodity prices are having on the economy – in particular, soybeans and corn. The region is the third largest soybean exporter in the U.S., so when export prices are impacted, a ripple effect can be felt throughout the economy as a whole.

But the EDC is not deterred by these ripples; in fact, it has embraced the challenges by strengthening the partnerships it has built with local businesses with an eye toward workforce development initiatives and with the local community and technical college, Ridgewater College, on attraction and retention initiatives. The EDC is also working with partners and developers on a \$9.4 million affordable housing development.

We spoke with Aaron Backman, Executive Director of the EDC, Connie Schmoll, the EDC's Business Development Specialist, and Sam Bowen, Dean of Customized Training and Continuing Education at Ridgewater College about the exciting initiatives they have been working on over the past year. ■

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"We work hard along with the EDC and other entities in trying to keep students local once they complete school so that they become a part of the workforce, and for others to return once they are done with that educational pathway," explains Bowen.

"We are part of the Minnesota State College and University System. As such, that state public higher education system is one of the largest in the country, and as a member of that we have a lot of opportunity to bring knowledge and resources to bear at a local level," says Bowen. "Not many communities this size have the opportunity to leverage the strength and the resources of seven large state universities and more than 20 two-year community and technical colleges all here locally. So that's a pretty important factor and pretty important driver of our economy, and an opportunity for us to leverage those resources."

The MinnWest Technology Campus has been one asset that is helping to retain graduates. A new co-working space on the campus called WORKUP, featuring the latest technology and broadband services, quickly became a hub for entrepreneurial thinkers of all stripes.

"It offers a relaxed environment that our Millennials and Gen Xers are really attracted to," explains Schmoll. "They share with one another their marketing expertise, and when they have an issue or a problem comes up, everyone in the building gets together and helps problem solve together. It is a very collaborative environment that is attractive to young people launching new businesses."

The Kandiyohi County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (KCEO) program is another initiative that the EDC has been leveraging for workforce retention. This program offers high



"Employers are looking for more and more creative ways to build their workforce."

school juniors and seniors the opportunity to learn how to start and run a business firsthand while they are in school. Over 50 businesses are member partners of the program, which is significantly higher than other chapters of the program across the country, whose average business participation is 20 to 30. This program also carries college credits at Ridgewater College, building incentive for students to study and stay local.

"We're trying at Ridgewater to leverage the state's post-secondary enrollment options program in partnership with our local high schools or regional high schools. This option delivers more and more college-level class programming at the high schools that have college credits tied back to Ridgewater. This is an additional incentive for students to stay around here to hopefully become a more well-established part of our workforce," explains Bowen.

Another important asset to local businesses that is helping to bridge the gaps in the labor force is that Ridgewater has a very robust non-credit customized short-term training wing where it provides training across virtually every industry – from agriculture, to manufacturing, to public safety, to healthcare, to transportation.

"Our customized training department at Ridgewater College has been busy working to partner with local businesses and organizations to address the dire need for a strong workforce," says Bowen. "As such, the employers are looking for more and more creative ways to build their workforce, specifically a skilled and trained workforce. We are trying to take what we are learning from all of these partnerships to continue developing customized short-term entry level learning programs. The process has the potential to lead to great career earnings or education."

When I asked Backman, Schmoll and Bowen what they feel makes Willmar so special, it was evident that they truly enjoy the work they do because they are committed to the region.

"Having been working in this field for 25 years, I have been able to compare it with other communities that I have served in and there are several things that jump out at me," says Backman. "Number one, we have creative people here that do interesting things. For instance, a company called DI Labs, Inc. run by three brothers has the largest 3D printer in the state of Minnesota. And if you look at the MinnWest Technology Campus, there are 65 engineers who work for different companies on that campus of over 30 private companies; they have created over 200 patents and their companies work worldwide."

Backman cited other examples like Nova-tech Engineering, which boasts products in 49 countries around the world, Simply Shrimp, which is growing shrimp inside an old dairy barn, and Lettuce Abound, growing lettuce using aeroponics. He also talked about the Highway 23 Coalition, an organization that is working on the second longest highway corridor that spans the state of Minnesota. In the past year, the Coalition secured a \$105 million appropriation for improvements.

The volunteerism that occurs here is another thing that has impressed both Backman and Schmoll.

"We have a lot of community leadership," says Schmoll. "Many of our leaders come together to collaborate to build a strong, healthy community. The Chamber hosts programs for next generation leadership for persons under 40 years. They have a strong group of young people and they are there because they want to be leaders in building a strong, healthy community," she says.

"We have a great quality of life here in Willmar," continues Schmoll. "We have trails and lakes and parks and playgrounds. We care about our small businesses and our large businesses. We have diversity and we value the diversity in our community. Diversity offers a variety of food, celebrations, events and storefronts that are all part of a strong community."

Bowen went on to add that, "We have big city features with a small town community feel. We're the best of all worlds here in Willmar and we're a great business community and a career and educational opportunities community." ■



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Educational Resources

Educational opportunities flyer (Slimming Down)

Ridgewater

- * Ranked #31 out of 851 in the best community colleges in America (<https://www.niche.com/colleges/ridgewater-college/#rankings>)
- * Low student to instructor ratios (17:1)
- * Job placement over 94%
- * 39% of students graduate with NO debt
- * 2,031 students
- * Liberal Arts biggest program (213 graduates), Followed by Nursing (81), Instrumentation Technician (48), Nursing Assistant (44), Farm and Ranch Management (37), Veterinary Technician and Assistant (37)
- * Customized Training and continuing educations program
- * Over \$225,000 in scholarships awarded annually



Community Christian School:

- * Only Christian school in the area with PSEO opportunities
- * Accredited by the ACSI
- * Average class size of 15 students
- * Preschool and Daycare on-site
- * Christ-centered balanced curriculum
- * Foreign language opportunities (K-12)
- * Varsity sports available
- * Spiritual development with opportunities for mission trips, chapel and bible courses
- * K-12 inter-denominational Christian Education



COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Dream Technical Academy

- * Project-based learning
- * Free charter school
- * Still receive a traditional diploma
- * Service projects throughout the year
- * 7th-12th grade school
- * Partners with CCS for athletics
- * Small class sizes (12-15 kids)
- * Students choose what they learn about
- * Focus on student's personal life as well as education



Willmar Public Schools

- * Free busing for students
- * Impressive student ethic distributions
- * PSEO opportunities
- * KCEO
- * Career opportunities through classes
(Commercial drivers license) (certified nursing assistant)
- * New facilities
- * Project lead the way
- * Mandarin program
- * Internship can count as high school credits
- * Remodeled elementary schools



New London-Spicer

- * 100% graduation rate
- * KCEO
- * NLS Community Fitness Center
- * New turf field
- * Robotics team – went to worlds
- * Brand new auditorium
- * Low student to teacher ratios at all levels
- * Special education opportunities
- * 3D printers in all schools
- * Great Art programs



KMS – not reached

- * Excelling choral department
- * Extended bus routes
- * KMS 4 KIDS
- * KMS Early Childhood Initiative
- * Adult/Youth enrichment opportunities



CMCS – not reached

- * Impressive student to teacher ratio
- * New facilities
- * Increasing enrollment rates
- * Strong performing arts
- * Inclusive bus transportation
- * No PSEO
- * Athletic programs excelling

