

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
September 25, 2017
WORKUP, Willmar

Present: Donna Boonstra, Deb Geister, Jean Geselius, Melissa Knott and Emily Lien

Excused: Shari Courtney and Ryan Thielen

Absent: Sarah Isdal and Mike Negen

Guest: Jayme Sczublewski, REDstar Creative

Staff: Connie Schmoll, Business Development Specialist

Secretarial: Diane Beck, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Connie Schmoll called the meeting to order at approximately 12:05 p.m.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra SECONDED BY Emily Lien, to approve the July 24 and the August 28, 2017 minutes as e-mailed. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Social Media Statistics. Jayme Sczublewski reported she, Lindsey Donner and Aaron Backman will meet next week to work on the social media statistics. An update will be given at the October 23rd Marketing Committee meeting.

Tradeshow Display Concepts. REDStar Creative has completed two of the three tradeshow popup displays, which were displayed at today's meeting. The displays will be used at the Ag & Animal Science Conference on September 26th. The Committee is searching for a third photo that communicates action and includes a person that will be used for the third tradeshow display. Sczublewski showed a draft design. Melissa Knott suggested a photo of a high-powered water cutting tool used by RELCO to cut steel and contact a representative at another local company for a photo. Knott will send Sczublewski the information.

Highway 23 Coalition Flyer Update. Schmoll showed the Highway 23 Coalition membership spreadsheet. To date, four counties, seven cities, one organization, one individual and approximately 14 businesses have joined the coalition at various levels of commitment for a total of \$23,350 paid memberships and \$30,300 committed. Jean Geselius mentioned it may be beneficial to convey the benefits of membership and that membership is renewed annually. Discussion held if the Highway 23 Coalition membership will be placed on the website. Sczublewski

suggested adding a page to the existing website that includes the membership and the benefits of joining the Coalition. She also suggested creating a social media page. Donna Boonstra commented the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Commissioner Zelle along with MnDOT staff, will visit the area on October 13. Sczublewski is working on a large banner for Commissioner Zelle's visit showing an overview of the project and an action statement. Sczublewski will email a draft of the banner to committee members. If possible, the banner may be available for the Highway 23 Coalition meeting on September 27.

Business in Focus Draft Article and Ad. Schmoll provided a copy of the six-page article that will be included in the *Business in Focus* magazine (see attached).

NEW BUSINESS

Fall Newsletter. Sczublewski reiterated the committee decided to move forward on a quarterly e-newsletter as discussed at the last Marketing Committee meeting. The digital format is easy to track clicks and has content that can be used to feed the social media platforms. She suggested two-three shorter articles, i.e., Highway 23 Coalition and an article about project(s) on which the EDC is currently working. A draft newsletter may be available at the next meeting,

2018 Visitors Guide Ad. Schmoll discussed the 2018 Visitor's Guide ad. Backman submitted a draft one-page ad to Lakeside Press. Committee members suggested a two-page ad. Sczublewski will contact Lakeside Press to obtain the specs for the ad.

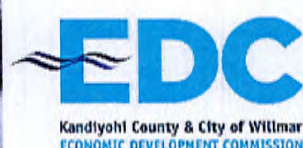
Other. Sczublewski shared Mike Negen has resigned from the EDC Marketing Committee leaving the chairperson position vacant. Knott volunteered to chair the committee next spring following the Governor's Fishing Opener. The committee briefly discussed an interim Chair. Schmoll will send out an email to the Marketing Committee members regarding the Interim Chair vacancy. Schmoll also encouraged members to recruit new members.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Jean Geselius, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra to adjourn the meeting.
MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:23 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **12 noon, Monday, October 23, 2017** at WORKUP, 1601 Technology Drive NE, Willmar.



Open for BUSINESS

Written by Gina Stephens

Kandiyohi County is an area that is seeing solid growth, new investments, and thriving local businesses with a focus on agriculture technology, advanced manufacturing, medical health and life sciences. It boasts some of the most innovative companies and public/private collaborations in west-central Minnesota.



The EDC was formed in the early 2000s as a result of government officials and local business leaders recognizing the need for a more collaborative approach to economic development between the city and the county. Legislators introduced a statute that established the EDC. It is set up as a unit of government, and staff are not employed by the city or the county but work with both levels of government.

The city of Willmar was founded in 1871 and is in the heart of Kandiyohi County. The southern half of the county is very agriculturally oriented, with much corn and soybean production. The northern half of the county is more focused on tourism, featuring a wealth of lakes that attract visitors from within the state and beyond.



The communities of New London, located on the Crow River, and Spicer, located on Green Lake, have several boutiques that make them a unique shopping destination. These two cities, along with the City of Willmar, will host the 2018 Governor's Fishing Opener event.

The county has a low unemployment rate of approximately four percent and features a vibrant local economy sustained by a number of larger enterprises. "We are blessed with some strong employers, so in terms of our unemployment rate, we are below the national average, which sometimes creates challenges in terms of workforce development," says Backman.

Located just two hours west of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minnesota, is the City of Willmar, in Kandiyohi County. *Business in Focus* spoke with Aaron Backman, the executive director of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC); Joanna Schrupp, business development officer for the MinnWest Technology Campus; and Betsy Bonnema from co-working space WORKUP, to learn more about this dynamic county and what it has to offer for existing and prospective businesses.

"An innovative and cutting-edge facility like the MinnWest Technology Campus is key to attracting a young and motivated workforce."

The largest employer in the county is Jennie-O Turkey Store, a poultry processing giant that employs over 1,600 people. "Jennie-O is an interesting company because they are one of the world's largest turkey processors. We also have the largest turkey breeding and hatching company nationally, which is Select Genetics," notes Backman.

Kandiyohi County is a regional medical hub with healthcare as its top industry. Rice Memorial Hospital is the second-largest employer in the region with 998 people. It is a Level 3 Trauma Center and the largest community-owned hospital in the state of Minnesota, serving fourteen counties.



Willmar is also home to the MinnWest Technology Campus, one of the largest privately owned technology campuses in Minnesota. This private sector organization was created in 2006 when one of the region's largest employers was considering leaving the area. To prevent such an exit, the city, county and state government collaborated with private sector technology and bioscience businesses in Willmar to facilitate the purchase of the hundred-acre property with almost three dozen buildings from the state to house the new technology campus.

"The private companies then purchased the property, renovated and restored some of its historic and majestic Spanish colonial cottages, and turned it into a beautiful technology park.



They moved to the campus, bringing more than one hundred employees with each phase of the project," explains Schrupp.

"The cottages continue to be 'built to suit' while maintaining the beautiful historic features. Currently, we have over thirty companies with more than six hundred people working on the campus. The companies boast an array of R&D-focused technology, high-tech cloud-based software, bioscience, and animal science companies, including national and global leaders in agriculture and advanced manufacturing such as Nova-Tech Engineering, Eptopix, Life Science Innovations (LSI), Prinsco, Inc. and Procore. There are also four state-of-the-art R&D labs including a University of Minnesota Level II clean room and teaching lab with a DNA sequencing machine – the only one of its kind in Minnesota outside of the Twin Cities and Mayo Clinic in Rochester," says Schrupp.

"We are coining ourselves as a community because we have onsite amenities including a data center, a 200-seat auditorium, a full gymnasium, walking trails, catering services, a cafeteria, and outdoor meeting and common space, as well as marketing agencies and estate planning attorneys on the campus. We have all of that at our fingertips," she says.

Backman notes that an innovative and cutting-edge facility with amenities like the MinnWest Technology Campus is key to attracting a young and motivated workforce. "Everyone wants to recruit millennials to work in different businesses. One way to recruit people is if you provide the right environment. When you provide a setting where people are stimulated, they feel like there is a community where they can network. We have that in MinnWest Technology Campus. We definitely have some interesting businesses out here. One of them, Procore, allows people to bring their dogs to work. That makes it different, which is helpful if you're trying to recruit young people."

The EDC, through its partnership with the MinnWest Technology Campus, is also assisting in the development of a homegrown, well-educated workforce through programs that the MinnWest Technology Campus is engaging in with local schools.

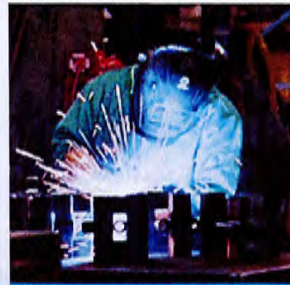
"We've been trying to reach out to the local area schools, concentrating on Willmar and the small communities that surround it. We are trying to plant the seed in these young students' minds that science, technology, engineering and math careers aren't as far off as they think they are," says Schrupp.

"We want to plant the seed, accentuate what they are doing in school. We've done things like hold annual science fairs, and I don't mean your typical, make-a-poster-board science fair. We

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"Students act as entrepreneurs, starting a real business of their own through the course of the program."

were bringing in major corporations, getting the business community involved, and they were bringing in their science and technology that they use every day, bringing it down to a level that the kids could actually understand what they were learning in the classroom. This is highly applicable to the everyday world. A lot of hands-on activities take place," she added.

Another program that came about from a collaboration between the EDC, area schools, and scores of local businesses is the Kandiyohi Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (KCEO) program. The program involves three local school districts and matches approximately twenty high school students, through a year-long, two-credit high school course, with local business leaders.

The KCEO class meets Monday through Friday from 7:15 AM to 8:45 AM in local businesses which provide business mentors. Students act as entrepreneurs, starting a real business of their own through the course of the program. KCEO is funded exclusively by investors and the local business community. ■

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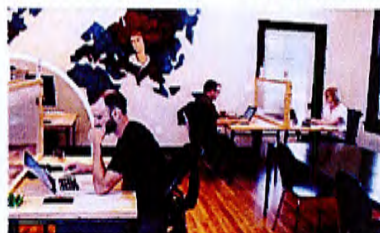
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“These students have to start their own businesses. By May of each year, they present their business plan, they meet with bankers, they secure seed money. The business community participates financially, on the board, and during the classroom sessions,” explains Schrupp.

An innovative feature of the MinnWest Technology Campus is WORKUP, a two-year old co-working space that is housed in a 4,200-square-foot, historic cottage on the campus. The cottage was remodeled to maintain the original historical architectural details, but updated to also allow for installation of the latest technology and amenities to attract start-ups and entrepreneurs to the space. Betsy Bonnema is the founder of WORKUP and the founder of REDstar Creative, a marketing and advertising agency.



“[REDstar] has been in business for twenty-seven years. We’ve been in this area for the whole time. The EDC and the MinnWest Technology Campus are clients of ours. We have a pretty tight-knit group of entities in the community that are always trying to build some momentum, especially around entrepreneurship. I was working on campus working in the offices of one of my biggest clients and the idea to open the space started to gel, and I reached out to people to get feedback and it worked out to be a good fit, so I worked with the campus to remodel one of their oldest buildings,” says Bonnema.

“We created that entrepreneurial community feel on a smaller scale, to have a community of people that were following their passions, starting businesses, freelancing, and getting away from the norm. My creative agency [REDstar] is the anchor tenant for the space [for WORKUP], and the EDC and the MinnWest Technology Campus are founding members. They have provided financial support and helped to get the word out to bring people to the space.”

In 2017, the EDC was also instrumental in efforts to create a new angel investment fund for technology and agriculture-related start-ups. West Central Angel Fund is interested in making investments in cutting-edge companies in the state, particularly in West Central Minnesota.

Backman notes that in addition to Willmar providing innovative spaces like WORKUP for businesses and entrepreneurs, it is also a diverse community with a large Latino and Somali/East African populations. Members of these communities own and operate approximately twelve percent of businesses in Willmar, as evidenced by a recent Diverse Businesses Business Retention and Expansion Survey (Diverse BRE) Program undertaken by the EDC. The survey identified thirty-one East African owned businesses, twenty-seven Latino owned businesses and at least eight Asian owned businesses.

“It’s great to see folks wanting to start businesses. Over time, they have increasingly gotten into non-retail commercial and service businesses. They have also been branching out, and that is interesting to see,” observes Backman.

“We have a pretty tight-knit group of entities in the community that are always trying to build some momentum, especially around entrepreneurship.”

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The EDC seeks to support this growing diversity in its community and is promoting a locally-based, multicultural market called the Midtown Plaza in the downtown area and will be a focal point to help multicultural businesses develop.

Another initiative that the EDC has supported is the development of an ethanol cooperative, Bushmills Ethanol Inc. The cooperative is made up of approximately four hundred farmers/member owners. Bushmills Ethanol runs a dry mill plant that produces sixty-five million gallons of ethanol per year. It is undergoing an expansion right now that will lead to production increasing to one hundred million gallons per year.

One key feature that differentiates Kandiyohi County and the City of Willmar from other neighboring counties is its certified, shovel-ready industrial park which has more than 130 acres available for development and is located just two miles from the airport. The industrial park is already home to more than thirty companies. Currently, there are plans to add rail access to the park. This project, the Willmar Wye, is in the design-to-build phase and aims to add a rail spur making it one of the few green-field parks in the state to have direct rail access.

The county also just recently completed a unique community project – an accessible playground. This \$900,000 project involved over 3,700 volunteers (between the ages of 10 to 82) in the construction. This destination playground is the third-largest fully accessible playground in the country.

“This is not your typical playground. This is a much bigger playground, and if someone is in a wheelchair, they have access to it,” says Backman.

What is next for this entrepreneur-friendly, business-ready county? The EDC will continue to provide strategic support for its existing businesses while creating innovative programs that

encourage new entrepreneurs and the growth of their new businesses. Now, more than ever, Kandiyohi County is, as the EDC’s tagline says, “Open for Business.” ■

“The EDC seeks to support growing diversity in its community and is promoting a locally-based, multicultural market called the Midtown Plaza.”

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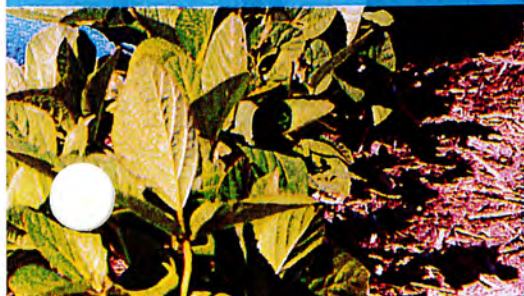
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