

Key Accomplishments & Highlights of 2006

Economic Development

Small Business Development Center:

SBDC counselors provided 1,027 counseling hours for 257 clients and \$9.3 million in client loans were approved. These clients retained 746 jobs and created 76 new jobs.

Major Projects:

Actively supported major Itasca area projects including, UPM Blandin, Minnesota Steel, Minnesota Power and Mesaba Energy. IEDC took a public position to support the Mesaba Energy project provided all environmental requirements are met. Supported economic impact studies for Minnesota Steel and Mesaba Energy through UMD's Labovitz School Bureau of Business and Economic Research. Facilitated successful land exchange process between Itasca County, UPM Blandin and Minnesota Steel.

Grow Minnesota:

In collaboration with the Grand Rapids Chamber, assisted owners and managers of 40 businesses that are the largest employers or have the greatest potential to gain/lose jobs. These businesses employed 3,625 as of December 2006 for a net loss of 112 jobs since December 2005. This includes 135 temporary layoffs at Ainsworth Lumber in September.

Itasca Technology Exchange (ITE):

ITE is at 80% occupancy; home to 9 tenant companies with 39 full time employees. The technology support facility at ITE completed a major upgrade funded by the Blandin Foundation and Iron Range Resources. Multiple options for expansion are being pursued.

Cohasset Technology & Innovation Building:

Worked extensively on grant application to Federal EDA for partial financing of Cohasset Technology & Innovation Building with Charter West as anchor tenant and loan packaging with area partners for remaining financing.

Job Opportunity Building Zone (JOBZ):

In 2006 two businesses qualified to operate under Job Opportunity Building Zone program in Itasca County. To date, five businesses have created 64 quality jobs while investing \$2.1 million in capital improvements.

Northeast Entrepreneur Fund Partnership:

Provided office space and client coordination for the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund which offers entrepreneurial training and loan processing.

Community Development

Outreach:

Co-sponsored two Town Hall Meetings, made presentations to Greenway Area Business Association and Itasca County Township Association regarding services provided by the Small Business Development Center and Northeast Entrepreneur Fund. Hosted meeting with Itasca area economic development partners to update financial partners on area's economic development projects. Sponsored presentation to area accountants and commercial bankers to raise IEDC's exposure in the financial community and improve ability to help clients through use of partner's financial programs.

Workforce Development:

IEDC is a strategic partner with the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce on the initiative to have all Itasca County residents work and/or college ready. Partnered with the Chamber to meet with major Itasca County employers to determine future workforce needs to begin the process of compiling the community's workforce needs in the next five years. Participated in meetings with Arlington, Texas workforce development leaders to learn about their strategic partnerships for a competitive workforce.

Itasca Building Development Fund:

The IEDC board approved the first low interest loan from fund to the Cohasset EDA as part of the financing of the Cohasset Technology and Innovation Building. Funding comes from the \$1.5 million Program Related Investment from the Blandin Foundation to stimulate quality jobs and private investment.

Public Infrastructure Improvements:

Supported Itasca County's successful effort to secure \$23 million of funding from the state for roads, rail and gas pipelines for Minnesota Steel and Mesaba Energy.

Grant Writer:

Hired the grant writing firm of Scaiangelo Consulting to assist Itasca County and IEDC grow and strengthen the capacity for economic development and Itasca County services.

Target Goals :

IEDC set two primary targets to attain the vision for a healthy community identified in 2005 Community Report. Target 1: By 2010 unemployment rate in Itasca County will be equal to or lower than Minnesota rate, Target 2: By 2015 the average annual wage paid per job in Itasca County will be equal to or higher than Minnesota's average wage.

Strategic Plan :

IEDC board and staff developed a strategic work plan for 2007 focused on achieving the above listed target goals. The dynamic plan is being reviewed with IEDC's strategic partners and improved based on their input.

South Central Itasca County Intergovernmental Planning Board:

The joint planning organization, staffed by IEDC, developed Wastewater Initiative Team to examine solutions for wastewater issues in south central Itasca County.

Non-Profit Organizations:

Assisted nine non-profit organizations in strategic planning.

Alignment, Organization and Communication

Itasca Economic Development Council (IEDC):

Changed legal name of organization to more accurately reflect organization's activities and focus.

Itasca Economic Development Advisory Council:

Clarified the advisory role of the council of 47 members from throughout the Itasca area; Council met three times in 2006.

Community Partnerships:

Coordinated three Itasca Community Engagement (ICE) meetings to engage people and organizations around issues of concern as highlighted in the 2005 Community Report. Coordinated planning meetings for 2006 Community Report. Increased number of private sector financial investors. Held two economic development co-op meetings with Chamber, Visit Grand Rapids, County Board, Grand Rapids Council & EDA representatives for the purpose of bringing together entities with a strong and vested interest in area's economic development.

Itasca Community Engagement (ICE):

Engaged the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation and United Way of 1000 Lakes in shared leadership with IEDC to mobilize and engage the community around issues of concern as highlighted in the 2005 Community Report. Co-facilitated three community wide ICE meetings.

Forums/Events/Meetings:

Held three forums on the topics of Education, Workforce Development and Wireless Communications. Hosted Annual Meeting and Community Celebration and Call to Action. Held reception for Labovitz Awards nominees and recipients. Hosted a facilitated conversation with community leaders to gain input on advancing the community's economic development future.

Communications:

Manned the promotional booth at Itasca County Fair and the Jaycees Home, Sport and Travel Show. Participated in ICTV programs and radio interviews, placed articles and ads in area newspapers and publications, promoted SBDC services and clients' businesses.

Community Report-Socioeconomic Indicators:

Produced and distributed 2005 Annual Report, 2005 Annual Perspective and 2006 Mid Year Perspective.

Action Teams :

Supported 8 Action Teams meeting the criteria of having regional scope, a clear and compelling economic impact and in which IEDC was uniquely positioned to add value to public engagement and deliberation.