

Quarter 1, 2023 - Newsletter



Letter from the President

“One way to keep momentum going is to consistently have greater goals.” – Michael Korda

Momentum has been propelling our team to new heights across all of our focus areas. Our growth continues in business consulting services, outreach, training, and special projects such as The Forge. We have not only found our stride, but as a team, found a way to tap each person’s expertise. There is nothing that makes a leader more proud than watching her team work together confidently and deliver excellent results.

IEDC has evolved over the past few years, and 2023 will be no different. We have challenges ahead of us as a community, and that means IEDC must continue to push the envelope and pursue higher risk and harder to achieve opportunities. As we are faced with the transition of the Boswell Energy Center, we must take action through outreach, planning and pursuing growth opportunities.

IEDC is working together with a group focused on creating a strategy around energy transition in Itasca County. This group includes leaders from our county, the city of Cohasset, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, MN Power, Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, as well as IEDC. We will be working with expert consultants on a yearlong process to engage our community in education, outreach, and planning. This Just Transition process will be an opportunity for our community to work together to develop a strategic vision for the future.

We encourage you to reach out to our team if you want more information on engaging in our many focus areas. We are better together.

-President, **Tamara Lowney**

SBDC Updates

2023 started strong and continues to grow in Itasca County! SBDC has documented 4 new business starts in the first quarter of 2023, with many others in process. Additionally, client numbers have increased, with 34 first-time clients this quarter and a total of 75 clients consulted

year to date.

This growth, building on what happened in 2022, has been a leading indicator of how strong our economy is in Itasca County and the bright future we have going forward. Similar to 2022, cost of capital and available space are the largest major constraints to business we are seeing. Business owners and future potential owners are navigating these difficulties and think out of the box to make projects come together.

A major focus over the last few years for consulting has been to ensure we are focusing our attentions on the entire Itasca County region. We are proud to report that 53% of our clients are outside of the Grand Rapids mailing area, which aligns well with our population centers. It has been a pleasure for us to learn and understand the county in a deeper way and develop plans that fit the unique concepts of each area's unique character.



The Forge Updates

The first quarter of 2023 can be described as the “Git ‘r Done” phase of the Forge with major construction activities on the educational wing in full process, as well as the award of phase 2 construction. Together, this means the Forge is now planned to be operational in Q2 and Q3 of 2023, with potential business and classes starting in the fall.

Marketing for the Forge, equipment purchases, and final design specifications will be completed in Q2, with more tours and outreach planned during the same time.

Looking into Q2, the Forge will be hosting two externs from our educator community in Itasca County to assist with commissioning equipment, final layout and set up, along with training and education. Please keep an eye out for opportunities to visit, learn more about this new adventure, and a new website being launched to interact with the community.

We are excited to be bringing this innovative, and top-notch facility to our community, and look forward to our grand opening in Q3!

1-19-2023: Team Deep Dive

This was a day of strategy! We put our heads together and dug deep- Do we need a receptionist at The FORGE? Where will the team reside? Will we even be in this location? Or that? You get it- It was a day of thinking about possibilities! The world is our oyster! We have secured funds to be able to complete some pretty big projects...But... We need bodies to be able to facilitate completion of these tasks- All the while we must juggle our own current workloads while we pepper in the whirlwind and excitement of spending those grants funds appropriately.

This is a time for reflections- a time to internally get hyper organized and very thoughtful about how we use our time efficiently and how we spend these funds ethically- We THRIVE on these tasks! It was a great day of placemaking our efforts and we pave the way to what IEDC will look like to be well poised in the future.

It has also become very evident, through our rural outreach efforts, that there is a need for, not only our services, but a multitude of services to become mobile! We, as a society, must make more of an effort to meet



folks where they are at. We must come to understand the diversity of Itasca County. We may not have diversity in the sense of the more obvious race, but we do have GREAT diversity when it comes to socio economics! We have trained ourselves to only look through our professional lenses and it has been very rewarding and eye opening to work to actually 'get out there' and talk with our rural neighbors about what their barriers are. Just the small act of putting ourselves out there to talk and listen has helped bridge some barriers for these rural folks who are more disadvantaged than others.

Though there is a lot of work to be done, IEDC continues to do work in these arenas. We are training our IDI skills to be better poised for workplace shortages, we are excited about the opening of The FORGE so that we can be a part of the upskilling of workforce! There are many things we are doing, and the excitement is palatable! Thank you for being a part of our excitement!



1-23-2023: January Lyceum

The theme for January's Lyceum was, *How is Modern Media Changing the Way We Think?*

"The fast-paced, endless scroll of TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram, the flood of cable TV news clips, and the constant stream of articles and headlines now fill our quiet moments. Whether in line at the store, between tasks at work, or lying awake at night, our experience of the world has been changed by modern media. The media critic Neil Postman famously argued that the way we receive information changes the way we think. How has modern media changed our own patterns of thought and behavior, for better or for worse? What should be our response to it?"

As always, our Lyceum event in January was very well attended and we had a stellar speaker. Heidi Holtan, News and Public Affairs Director for KAXE, presented on media in today's world. She put a unique rural spin on this conversation and then led the group through engaging table conversations. The group's commission was a promise to take what is released in the media, study it, and ensure we are spreading the truth.

1-26-2023: EDAM

The 2023 Winter EDAM Conference was held at The InterContinental Minneapolis-St.Paul Airport. This event was attended by: Small Business Consultant, Nichole Arbour; Project Manager, Amanda Lamppa; and Operations & Outreach Manager, Kayla Swanson.

Attendees were able to choose from presentations encompassing topics that are at the forefront of every economic developer's mind. Topics included: construction & development in a post-pandemic environment, workforce challenges, diversity, equity, inclusion, funding resources, and more.

It was great to be able to connect and share best practices with colleagues in both economic and community development from across the state.





2-6-2023: Yanmar/ASV Celebration

Yanmar, formerly known as ASV, has always been an incredible partner to Itasca Economic Development Corporation and a significant economic driver for Itasca County, our region, state, and beyond! In 2022, Yanmar Compact Equipment North America received the Governor's International Investment Award.

To celebrate their local investments in Itasca County and show appreciation of their partnership, our team hosted a gathering on Monday, February 6th from 4-5 pm at Rapids Brewing Company.

The agenda included networking, heavy appetizers, and presentations from the following people:

- Matt Sjoberg, Executive Director of Development, IRRR
- Dale Christy, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids
- Tate Johnson, President of Yanmar North America

2-13-2023: Ball Club Day of Connections

Ball Club Day of Connections was another opportunity for us to work with Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to bring services to that community. We were excited to see the turnout in Ball Club, with 20 vendors and 73 participants present, including services such as Tribal ID's, Elder Services, Childcare, and our event partner, Paul Bunyan Communications. There were 34 Tribal ID's issued and 23 households signed up for broadband.

The Day of Connections event brings communities together through food, support, and advocacy. We are so grateful for the opportunity to continue to build our relationship with Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the Local Indian Council communities. This outreach will continue as we look to host our next event Monday, June 26th in Deer River. The event will be in partnership with LLBO as well as Itasca County and other community partners. Join us as we work together to bring resources to people, where they are at.



2-21-2023: IEDC Annual Meeting

Itasca Economic Development Corporation's Annual Meeting was held on February 21st, 2023 at The Timberlake Lodge. The Annual Meeting agenda looked a little different this year compared to years past.

The night kicked off with some networking and a dinner prepared by the staff at the Timberlake. Ida Rukavina, Commissioner of IRRR opened the



evening presentations. She discussed the importance of partnerships through our region, state, and beyond.

Tamara Lowney, President of IEDC; and Mike Auger, Board Chair for IEDC, presented on all initiatives that our team has taken on in the past year! Rob Sjostrand, Director of Business Development, spoke on behalf of SBDC at IEDC and Amanda Lamppa, Project Manager, spoke on behalf of Innovate 218.

After IEDC's presentation, our internal partners, recapped their year. Presenting were:

- Rachel Johnson & Matt Shermoen, APEX
- Sarah Carling, CEDA
- Mike Korte, Entrepreneur Fund

2-23-2023: Women in the Workforce

Minnesota North College-EMPOWER partnered with True North Stars/Perkins, United Steel Workers Women of Steel, Jet and Women's Foundation of Minnesota to put on "Women in the Workforce" events at Minnesota North College Campuses in February. February 23rd, was the event at MN North College - Itasca Campus.

IEDC's Operations & Outreach Manager, Kayla Swanson, was asked to be a panelist alongside many other inspiring women. These women shared their stories on how they reached new heights in their careers. Sitting beside Kayla was IEDC board member and local entrepreneur, Megan Kellin. It was a great opportunity to encourage young women in our region to go forth without fear of failure in whichever career path they choose.



2-27-2023: February Lyceum

February's Theme was, *Can We Have Heroes?*

"We live in a time when so much is documented that we know the foibles and faults of all the people in the public eye and many of our historical figures have come under greater scrutiny. Can we still have heroes when we know so much about the faults of human beings? Do we need to have heroes? Why or why not?"

Joe Dasovich, Itasca County Sheriff was the presenter at February's Lyceum.

We had a great crowd at the Rapids Brewing Co. for this event. Attendees enjoyed the fact that they could sit around a table, share thoughts, eat pizza, and get to know new people. It's clear that not everyone has the same thought about each topic and that is what's so unique about Lyceum events. They allow people to get out of their comfort zones and really try and hear the opinions of others. At the end, the common thought was: make sure you thank someone who you see as a hero in your own life.



3-3-2023: March First Friday

We had a great turnout for the March First Friday event. This event took place on March 3rd, 2023!

Our featured artist, Samsoshe Sampson was on site to greet guests and even played a surprise performance on his flute. We had Adessa and Keith of Adessa & the Beat performing as an amazing acoustic duo. They also invited special guest, local singer Ditty Wish to perform a few songs with them.

As always, one of our amazing local caterers, Pinched Catering, provided appetizers and sweets were brought in from Miss Sarah's Northern Treats Cupcakery.

Our staff loves celebrating the local arts culture in Itasca County. Therefore, First Friday Art Walks are one of our favorite events to host.



3-15-2023: SBDC Day Celebration

"SBDC Day is a national, collective proclamation of the impact America's Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) have on the success of our nation's dreamers, innovators, and doers – America's small businesses. SBDC Day unites the nearly 1,000 SBDC centers across the country and the hundreds of thousands of clients they serve by sharing, in real time, the success stories and notable impacts SBDCs collectively have on the small business community at large." Find this information and more at: <https://americassbdc.org/sbdcday/>.

Locally, along with the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, we celebrated our small businesses and were able to showcase some of our mobile businesses that we have assisted with startup: Chad's Meat Wagon, Stonegrove Sauna's and Jeff's Restroom Trailers were parked in the chamber parking lot for residents to explore.

3-27-2023: March Lyceum

March's Theme was, *Do We Have Culture?*

"We use the word "culture" in all kinds of ways. We talk about pop culture, workplace culture, political culture, culture war, and so much more. But what about the stories, artworks, songs, food, and more that make up our daily life? Do we feel like we have a rich local culture and identity? Why or why not? What is it like? What defines it? This was an opportunity to hear from local cultural producers and for the community to talk among itself about what our own local culture really is."

Keith Turner, Co-Owner of The Promise is You presented on this subject.



It was a unique presentation, as Keith incorporated small group activities throughout his presentation. These allowed for even more discussion amongst neighbors. We had a very wide variety of attendees, especially in ages! We will be hosting one more Lyceum event in April before taking a break until September.



Innovate 218 Updates

It has been a few years of ‘experimenting’ with what program pieces are working and we are so pleased to say that, looking back and reflecting, this program has been very successful! We started this adventure with the support of numerous regional partners knowing that this regional program would eventually move onto a bigger entity with more of a NE regional outreach that IEDC can tackle alone.

We are proud to have started this initiative, and grateful for we have made, and amazed at the momentum Innovate 218 has had on entrepreneurs in NE Minnesota! Our Launch MN grant will end June 30 of this year. We are currently in discussions with some of our regional partners about who will take Innovate 218 to the next level. IEDC will still be hands-on in our efforts to keep the momentum moving forward, but the home of Innovate 218 will likely change.

Our most recent pitch competition took place on May 9th in Chisholm at the Rustic Pig inside the MN Discovery Museum. First Place went to Rebekah Evingson. Second Place went to Josh Oswald. The Crowd Pleaser award went to Grand Rapids Native, Renee Cole!

Thrive Up North Updates

Thrive Up North is a rural recruitment campaign that was brought forth by public/private partnerships in Itasca County. In 2022, we started our first Incentives package, *Luring You to Itasca*.

In 2022, the incentives program had over 35 applicants! Of those, 21 were accepted! We are excited to announce that we are starting the 2023 incentives program.

Eligibility requirements are the same for the 2023 incentives program, except one. The taskforce decided to change the move requirement to, “must apply within 2 months of your move.” We ran into many issues with having employment before housing. This will give people more time to find housing upon employment in Itasca County.

1. The new package includes:

- i. \$2,000 Cash Incentive
- ii. 6 Months free Gigazone internet through Paul Bunyan (if applicable).
- iii. \$50 to a Local Brewery
- iv. \$25 to a Local Coffee Shop
- v. 1 - Thrive Up North Branded RTIC Water Bottle.
- vi. 1 - Thrive Up North Branded RTIC Mug
- vii. 2 - Thrive Up North Branded Fishing Lures

viii. 4 - YMCA Day Passes

We've been extremely happy with the outreach that the Thrive Up North package has offered. It's just another incentive to allow new residents to live, work, and play in Itasca!





APEX Updates

APEX Housing Initiative Generates Interest Around the State

Lack of housing in our region is one barrier to hiring. In a recent survey conducted by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce to garner insights on business expansion, 38% of respondents wanted to increase their employee count while 80% indicated difficulty in hiring. Housing studies have been conducted and there's confirmed demand from employers for workforce housing, yet market conditions present obstacles to housing development. Employers are looking at ways they can invest in housing solutions to attract the workforce.

APEX has been convening public and private stakeholders in the Twin Ports area and developing a workplan that can be deployed more broadly in communities throughout the region.

Solving the housing crisis will take trust, community commitment and industry investment. As we uncover projects and connect developers and builders, we're also identifying and securing creative funding opportunities to spur housing project starts. Some of the development challenges include higher interest rates and holding costs; general uncertainty of the next 18 months; lack of site readiness and high cost to buildout infrastructure, outdated land use, economies of scale challenges for local builders. Creative solutions include industry investment into a community development fund that could be accessed to fill project funding gaps. Developer and builder incentives, subsidizing pre-development costs, accessing HRA tools, assembling tax forfeiture land, federal and state level grants are all being considered.

Public private partnerships are necessary to add housing stock and these community conversations and development plans are underway. Reach out to APEX to get involved.

Entrepreneur Fund Updates

In 2023, EFund has partnered with 32 businesses to support growth in Itasca County. These partnerships have resulted in 10 loans for a total of \$1.1 million invested in Itasca County so far this year.

There are currently two unique lending programs to be aware of. First, the **Healthy Food Fund** for food retailers and producers, and second the **Automation Loan Participation Program** for manufacturers. If you have questions about either of these programs, please reach out to Mike Korte.

Join our email to stay connected to EFund news and updates. Also, check out our **events calendar** that highlights small business events in our region.

Thank you to IEDC for your continued partnership in supporting economic growth of Itasca County!





CEDA is excited to announce the addition of Lisa Randall to the team in February 2023, bringing with her more than 30 years of diverse experience that includes program development, grant writing, volunteer coordination, township and city government, small business development, sales, recruitment, training, professional speaking, and nonpartisan legislative experience. Having lived, worked and played in Itasca County all but just a handful of years, she's passionate about developing vibrant rural communities in and near her hometown of Grand Rapids. Being the wife and family member of several combat-era Veterans, she's passionate about Veteran-related issues. Colleagues have described Lisa as, "trustworthy, engaging and a pleasure to work with."

Lisa is an alumni of the Blandin Foundation Community Leadership Program, the Northwest Minnesota Foundation LeaderImpact Program and is a Gallup-certified Clifton StrengthsFinder Facilitator. She holds an Associate of Applied Science degree from Alexandria Technical College where she was the recipient of the "Outstanding Student" award as selected by faculty.

Bringing her diverse work experience, strong network of contacts and enthusiasm to support communities, Lisa has hit the ground running in making a positive impact in the Itasca County area. In just her first three months with CEDA, Lisa has already written several successful grants in support of projects in Coleraine, Goodland, Hill City and Northome.

Lisa lives with her husband Mike in Blackberry Township in the home built by Mike's great-grandparents on the Mississippi River, just down the road from her childhood home. She enjoys time with family, outdoor activities, motorcycling, boating, watching sports, traveling, outdoor photography and concerts.

If you haven't met Lisa yet or would like to know more about the work that CEDA is doing through the Itasca County area, please contact Lisa at: lisa.randall@cedausa.com.



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