Waterville Economic Development Corporation Collaborates To Attract Business

BY KAREN GERHARDINGER MIRROR REPORTER

Attracting industries and jobs to Northwest Ohio is a team effort.

During the Waterville Economic Development Corporation’s (WEDC) annual meeting on November 20, the team was assembled. State Sen. Randy Gardner, Gov. John Kasich’s representative Chase Eikenbary and leaders from the Regional Growth Partnership, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority, City of Waterville, Waterville Chamber of Commerce, Jobs Ohio, Northwest Ohio Regional Economic Development, the Lucas County Economic Development Corporation and Anthony Wayne Local Schools were there. So were realtors, engineering and construction companies, financial firms, health care providers and many local businesses.

“We had an incredibly diverse group of attendees,” said WEDC board member Phyllis Hyder. “These kind of collaborative gatherings lead to positive progress throughout the region and are a win-win for all.”

Dennis Burnside, a Cleveland-based economic development and real estate consultant who works with clients seeking sites around the country, said Ohio is a place of choice for many companies. “Ohio is a role model for economic development and business attraction nationwide,” he said.

As a managing partner with Mohr Partners’ Cleveland office, Burnside has worked with companies of all sizes, from Apple Computer and General Motors to smaller industries, finding sites that are the right fit.

He also works with agencies such as the Regional Growth Partnership (RGP) to focus on attracting targeted industries to a region. In Northwest Ohio, tapping that list are automotive-related, advanced manufacturing, polymers and chemicals, and food processing industries.

“You cannot win on your own – you need a partner,” Burnside said, looking out at the more than 70 attendees gathered at Browning Masonic Community.

RGP president Gary Thompson noted that area community leaders have done a good job of collaborating to bring business to the region – even if it means a loss for a particular municipality.

Northwest Ohio is known for being a crossroad for transportation and for its available workforce. Waterville additionally is known for its quality of life, including excellent schools, low crime and recreational opportunities.

While the WEDC is living up to its motto of “Enabling a vibrant community through economic development,” Burnside had suggestions for boosting interest.

“Across the country, companies are looking for existing real estate,” he said.

Companies are looking for buildings of 25,000 to 100,000 square feet that could be move-in ready for an interested business, he said. He encouraged a public/private partnership to prepare such a facility, which is a calculated investment.

Burnside also suggested focusing on creating a recognizable brand for Waterville and promoting it like a salesperson. Use that when creating an economic development strategy that is reviewed and retooled each year, he said.

And while attracting businesses is top-of-mind for the WEDC, so should be retaining businesses, Burnside said.

Keeping Kaufman Engineered Systems, Crum Manufacturing, Surface Combustion and Parker Hannifin, for example, starts with a phone call to keep lines of communication open, he said.

“You’re all ambassadors for the community,” he said. “And I think you’re on the right path.”

For more information on the WEDC, visit www.watervilledc.org or call (419) 464-2953.

Gathered at the WEDC meeting are (from left) Anthony Wayne Local Schools board member Gary Roser, Superintendent Dr. Jim Fritz, State Sen. Randy Gardner and Cobalt Consulting owner Sara Bowen.

St. Luke’s Hospital president Dan Wakeman (left) and marketing director Scott Rupley (right) visit with WEDC board member Dave Bootle.

The Regional Growth Partnership’s Lisa Wagner (left) and Mike Jay (right) visit with Bill Brennan, Lucas County Planning and Development.

Engaged in discussion after the meeting are (from left) OBS Financial Services’ Catherine Farley and John Henry; Gary Thompson, Regional Growth Partnership; Tim Pedro, Waterville Economic Development Corporation; and Paul Toth, Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority.