



Cass County
Economic Development Corporation
Annual Report
2012

Presented by
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In January 2012, Cass County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) and LaGrow Consulting formalized a partnership for economic development services. I believe our partnership has strengthened the county's reputation within each community by showing businesses and residents that we are here to support them.

Thank you to the CCEDC for allowing me to serve as the Director for the 2012 year. I began the year by fostering relationships with many departments within the County as well as various partner agencies. My main goal was to facilitate job creation and investment within Cass County. One of my objectives was to educate the public on services the County had to offer both existing and new businesses. We provided traditional economic development activities as well as non-traditional activities such as leadership development and business consulting.

I end the year with a wealth of information that has been transferred to our manufacturing community with continued hopes that the businesses in the county will continue to grow. As we move into 2013, we need to continue our pro-active approach to business and economic development.

Mission Statement

Our mission as a Community Economic Development Corporation is to be the Catalyst and Advocate for the Stakeholders and Assets of Cass County by working to enhance the economic environment.

Objectives

Our mission, objectives and goals are aimed at business retention, expansion and then attraction efforts in the County. We can:

- Buy and sell property.
- Provide bond financing for industrial projects.
- Proactively promote economic development and improvement of business conditions for job retention/creation and job training.
- Provide direction, coordination and collaboration with public agencies, private organizations and the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indian Tribe.
- Research resources for industry such as credits, grants, and loans for business and assist industry in accessing the resources.
- Serve at the pleasure and direction of the Cass County Commission.

Goals for 2013

- Meet with all industrial companies in the County through the Business Retention program.

- Meet with the medical establishments in the County.
- Meet with partner agencies to improve the economic development tools and access for our businesses.
- Attend the International Economic Development Conference.
- Attend the Michigan Economic Developers Association Conference.
- Network connection with 15 new site consultants.
- Serve as the County representative with Connect Michigan to further the broadband accessibility in the county.
- Continue our network, contact and relationship with partner agencies in the State and at the Federal level.
- Speed Funding event for the banking and entrepreneurial community.
- Work with all school systems (Dowagiac, Marcellus, Edwardsburg and Cassopolis Public Schools) to provide manufacturing knowledge to their students and parents during the 2012-2013 school year.
- Serve as the County lead for Michiana Partnership.
- Develop an annual Business to Business (B2B) Connect event.

Website

In today's technologically advanced society, more and more people are using the web to search for information on businesses instead of calling agencies directly for assistance. We completely overhauled the Economic Development section of the County website including property listings, largest employers, links and added a marketing profile. Thanks to Kerry Collins for assisting the CCEDC with our web changes.

Local Communities

It has been at least five years since the CCEDC had a formal economic development program. I believed it was important to go and meet with communities (City, Villages, and Townships) directly and explain how we could provide assistance for municipal and business grants in their community.

Business Retention Program – Business Watch

The Cass County Economic Development Corporation has been responding to a challenging business climate by putting additional efforts into growing jobs locally and nurturing local businesses. In addition to our commitment to recruit new businesses, the CCEDC recognized the importance of keeping local businesses healthy and viable. I met with existing business owners through one-on-one advising and review of business wants and needs. I was able to make determinations on what programs or resources could help each business. This also served as an opportunity to learn more about businesses to see if there was an opportunity for business-to-business introductions to keep more work in the County. During our Business Watch visits we discussed relationships, supplier access, retention of business, and on-going challenges, including supply chain recruitment and workforce development.

This past year, I met with 44 key manufacturing companies in the County. Through my visits, I was able to assist with electricity needs, supplier concerns, human resource issues, marketing needs and zoning issues. All of this resulted in the creation of over 300 jobs for 2011.

Partner Agency's

Cass County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) has knowledge of economic development programs, practices and projects. However, it doesn't have the personnel, financial resources, or legislative programs to address the needs of the communities and companies within Cass County. Therefore, we rely heavily on our network and partnerships available in the state or federal government.

Congressman Upton Visited Dowagiac

Congressman Upton visited Deerpath Recycling and Lyons Industries in October to see what challenges the businesses were facing. The ability to attract employees who want a job and actually show up to work was the #1 concern for both employers. Congressman Upton was hands on in both facilities and talked directly to employees and management about concerns that they had on gas prices and the economy.

Southwest Michigan First - Regional EDC (SWM1st)

Southwest Michigan First is an organization of privately funded economic development advisors who act as the catalyst for economic success in Southwest Michigan. Founded in 1999 on the principle that jobs and wealth creation exponentially affect the region's future sustainability, the organization works across all industries throughout the eight counties making up the Southwest Michigan Region.

SWM1st provides the site consultant function for the State of Michigan. I traveled with SWM1st and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation this year for business attraction efforts. SWM1st sent out Requests for Proposals (RFP) for various projects either new to Michigan or for existing companies within Michigan. Each RFP was specific to a project and had to be customized ranging from a one-page informational or fact sheet to a booklet of information on sites or buildings in the county. The turnaround time was sometimes as little as 2 days to 2 weeks.

Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC)

Since 1991, MMTC has helped Michigan's small and medium-sized businesses compete and grow. Through personalized services fitted to meet the needs clients, MMTC has helped develop more effective business leaders, promote company-wide operational excellence and foster creative strategies for business growth & greater profitability.

The MMTC assisted several companies with web-site development, training and marketing programs to diversify their business.

Michigan Works (MW)

Michigan Works! Berrien-Cass-Van Buren is a non-profit workforce development organization whose mission is to provide a skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers. They have three offices in Southwest Michigan and offer services to employers, job seekers, and youth.

We utilized MW for job fairs, hiring assistance, pre-screening for employment, job searches, and job training.

I will be discussing the future of economic development with key leaders and staff at Michigan Works this month. With concerns over worker pipeline, it is essential for us to work together to ensure that our local employers can find the people they need to fill their job openings.

Human Resource Council

Through a partnership with Michigan Works, we created a Human Resource Council to help assist area employers with filling job openings. We had several job fairs in the County this year including strategically looking to our Veteran's to fill vacant job openings. The council also tackled issues on insurance and safety in the workplace.

Campus Bash

In partnership with Southwestern Michigan College, the County was involved in Campus Bash twice this year. Our purpose for being involved was to access students and educate them on job openings and opportunities in the County. For the 2 events we had over 160 students fill out applications.

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)

The Michigan Department of Transportation is responsible for planning, designing, and operating streets, highways, bridges and railroads that are state owned. They are responsible for all Michigan Highways including our major transportation arteries such as Interstate 94.

We are working with MDOT on four company rail expansion projects. For most of the companies, constructing rail will save them a minimum of \$650,000 per year.

Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is a public-private partnership serving as the state's marketing arm and lead agency for business, talent and jobs, tourism, film and digital incentives, arts and cultural grants, and overall economic growth. MEDC offers a number of business assistance services and capital programs for business attraction and acceleration, economic gardening, entrepreneurship, strategic partnerships, talent enhancement and urban and community development. MEDC, founded in 1999, also developed and manages the state's popular Pure Michigan brand.

The MEDC is working with the CCEDC to provide company incentives for expansion projects and new attraction projects that would be new to our region. The process is lengthy and does require a “but for” provision. Additionally, the MEDC works with our other partner agencies to provide access to other programs such as marketing or training to help a company.

Michiana Partnership

The Michiana Partnership is a new regional economic development organization. The partner counties are Berrien, Cass, and St. Joseph Counties in Michigan and Elkhart, Marshall, St. Joseph and Kosciusko Counties in Indiana. The purpose of this group is to promote the region to prospective employers whom are looking to start a business or expand their business. The seven counties believe that as a region, they have the critical mass population and suppliers that large manufacturers are looking for in a new location.

Edwardsburg Chamber of Commerce- Business to Business

The Edwardsburg Chamber of Commerce hosted a Business to Business Event where 64 businesses and 8 restaurants attended. The purpose of this event was to connect businesses together in hopes they would keep their subcontracting work within the county.

County Treasurer for Land Bank Assistance

Strong Economies Together (SET)

The Strong Economies Together (SET) was launched in 2009 by the USDA Rural Development Program in collaboration with the nation’s Regional Rural Development Centers and their land-grant university partners. The purpose of SET is to strengthen the capacity of communities in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of their region. Important elements of the SET program will build collaboration between communities in a region, provide economic analyses that are tailored to help capture the region’s current or emerging clusters and comparative economic advantages and is supported by technical assistance provided by land-grant university extension systems (Michigan State University) to the region over a period of several months including SET training.

We identified 4 areas of focus – Education, Broadband, Food Hub, and Place-making.

- Education – we need a qualified, trained, and available workforce. Education in our county is a main component for providing ready, willing and able workers including filling the worker pipeline in the region.
- Broadband – the lack of broadband has created a barrier for development in our region. Companies and their suppliers/clients expect to be able to communicate with each other in “real-time” or instantaneously. The SET group is in the process of identifying the

“have not’s” where dial-up internet or no internet exists and approach the providers to fill the gaps of broadband connectivity.

- Food Hub – in our region we have an abundance of agriculture, however, we do not have the manufacturing component of agriculture labeling the “manufacturing” component as an opportunity for economic growth. We are meeting with farmers, coops and marketing firms to see how we can bring more agriculture manufacturing or processing into the region.
- Place-making – as a group we identified our region as “behind the 8-ball” in marketing or place-making. We know that some of our businesses serve as an attraction of visitors to our region, however, we still have not, in many areas, identified our “Brand”. We want more people to come into the area to purchase goods and visit.

This group will continue to meet with Michigan Works and the Southwest Planning Commission providing leadership to the group.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The United States Department of Agriculture is the federal executive department responsible for developing and executing U.S. federal government policy on farming, agriculture, and food. It aims to meet the needs of farmers and ranchers, promote agricultural trade and production, work to assure food safety, protect natural resources, foster rural communities and end hunger in the United States and abroad.

The USDA can provide small business loan guarantees, or community facilities grants including some planning grants for non-infrastructure related projects. We have 1 community and 1 developer who are actively engaging the USDA programs.

School Presentation at Dowagiac Schools

As a result of our business retention program, we recognized that employers were having a difficult time finding employees to fill jobs. We also determined that we are lacking young people to fill the worker pipeline in the region. We partnered with Dowagiac Union Schools to bring in Lyons Industries and Michigan Works to talk to students about manufacturing careers. All students are not 4-year College bound; however they do need post-high school education. We have started planning for this school year and have scheduled visits to Marcellus, Edwardsburg, and Dowagiac in January and March. Cassopolis Public Schools will be reviewing their schedule and determining when the best time is to bring our information into their school.

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC)

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) serves Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties as one of fourteen regional planning and development organizations in the State of Michigan.

The mission of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is to promote a sustainable, high quality of life through the facilitation of sound planning and decision-making. The SWMPC is committed to facilitating the development of intergovernmental cooperation and coordination within our region and with our neighboring regions.

The SWMPC specializes in providing data, information, maps, and technical assistance for planning and grant writing in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. The major program areas include transportation, economic development, community planning, and natural resource protection.

The SWMPC is an integral part of the Stronger Economies Together program as well as the “Single Point of Contact” (SPOC) for the Comprehensive Economic Development Survey (CEDS). CEDS is a prerequisite to several grant agencies. If a community has a project that they are wanting to fund with grant funds, the project has to be identified in the CEDS to pre-qualify.

Connect Michigan

Connect Michigan, in partnership with the Michigan Public Service Commission, is working to ensure that all can experience the benefits of broadband. Technology, especially widespread access, use, and adoption of broadband, improves all areas of life. Cass County based on rural location is lacking in connectivity leaving some businesses disconnected from their customers. Milton Township and the City of Dowagiac are actively involved in the initiative.

Southwestern Michigan College (SMC)

SMC’s top priority is student success – both academic and personal. SMC is committed to offering the highest quality academic experience to further educate students and occupational skills training in numerous technical, business, health-care geared toward preparing students for high-wage, high-skill, and high-demand occupations. SMC campuses are located in Dowagiac and Niles.

I utilized the College several times in the last year to locate students with a specific skill set for companies within the County. The Michigan Technical Education Center (MTEC) provides for industry related training and expertise.

MSU Extension Product Development Center

The Michigan State University (MSU) Product Center helps Michigan entrepreneurs develop and commercialize high-value, consumer-responsive products and businesses in the agriculture, natural resources, and bio-economy sectors. The Product Center is a single gateway to generating success for Michigan entrepreneurs. We referred two companies to the product center for assistance with broadening their sales and product development.

Edward Lowe Foundation

The foundation actively embraces and encourages entrepreneurship as the source and strategy for economic growth, community development and economically independent individuals.

Mission of the Edward Lowe Foundation

To champion the entrepreneurial spirit by providing information, research and educational experiences that support entrepreneurship and the free enterprise system, consistent with the intent of our founders, Edward and Darlene Lowe.

In 1985 Ed and Darlene created the Edward Lowe Foundation to “champion the entrepreneurial spirit” as a cornerstone of the free enterprise system. Today the foundation pursues two goals to fulfill its mission. The first is to help second-stage business owners take their companies to the next level through peer learning. The second is to encourage wider understanding of the vital role second-stage companies play in the U.S. economy.

Projects

Cass Inter-local Joint Fire Board
Developers Meeting in Detroit
Atlanta Blitz

Existing Company Expansions

Cass Family Medical Clinic
Duo Form - Electric Transition
Railroad Spur
EPA and DEQ final inspections are Premier Tool and Die Cast
Creative Foam – New line and electric upgrade with job creation and energy efficiency
Lyons Industries – Added 2nd shift and added 100+ jobs
Custom Formulating – purchased the former Georgie Boy Facility and increased employment
Bentzer relocation into the former Sindelar Building in Edwardsburg

Attraction Efforts

We worked with 24 formal Request for Proposals (RFPs) including an R&D company for the Village of Cassopolis. The process for attraction efforts varies greatly. Sometimes we are contacted by a Site Consultant, State of Michigan, Southwest Michigan 1st, or initiated by the CCEDC. The RFP usually is very specific on where a company is looking to locate, the number

of acres they need, and the square footage of the building needed to operate their business. The RFP will also state whether a company is looking for utility and infrastructure related to a site. The RFP process turnaround time is usually less than seven days.

2012 New Business/Expansion of Business

Fryman’s Recycling	15 jobs
B & W Enterprise	10 jobs
Premier Tool and Die Cast Corporation	120 jobs (200 jobs)
Painter (Inovateus Center)	12 jobs
New Business – Location	3 jobs – County Building Lead
Cass Family Medical	\$4.4M Grant for new facility and 15 jobs
Custom Formulating	8 jobs
E-Scrap – Dowagiac	4 jobs
Adam Christie – Howard Township	
Lyons Industries	100 jobs+
Creative Foam	20 jobs+
Custom Formulating	15 jobs
Dowagiac E’cycling	5 jobs

Loss of Business

Hess Industries
 Sindelar Woodworking