



*Cass County
Economic Development Corporation
Annual Report
2013*

Presented by
LaGrow Consulting
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	4
II.	MISSION STATEMENT	4
III.	OBJECTIVES	4
IV.	GOALS FOR 2014	5
V.	WEBSITE	5
VI.	LOCAL COMMUNITIES	5
VIII.	BUSINESS RETENTION PROGRAM – BUSINESS WATCH	6
IX.	MEDC MARKETING TRIP	6
X.	MEDA CONFERENCE	6
XI.	ST. JOSEPH COUNTY TOURISM	6
XII.	PAY IT FORWARD CAMPAIGN	7
XIII.	RESOURCES	7
	A. EDWARDSBURG CIA	7
	B. GEORGE’S CAFÉ.....	7
	C. FAIRGROUND GRANT	7
	D. ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANT (AFG) – EDWARDSBURG AMBULANCE	7
	E. HOWARD TOWNSHIP HALL	7
	F. BUSINESS PURCHASE	7
XIV.	NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILROAD	8
XV.	CANADIAN NATIONAL (CN) RAILROAD	8
XVI.	JOBS FOR AMERICA’S GRADUATES (JAG)	8
XVII.	JOB FAIR AT DOWAGIAC MICHIGAN WORKS (KINEXUS)	8
XVIII.	EDWARDSBURG EXPO	8
XIX.	MICHIANA SUPERNET (MS)	8
XX.	AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE – BATTLE CREEK	8
XXI.	PARTNER AGENCY’S	9
	A. <i>SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST - REGIONAL EDC (SWM1ST)</i>	9
	B. <i>MICHIGAN MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY CENTER (MMTC)</i>	9
	C. <i>MICHIGAN WORKS (MW) NOW IS KINEXUS</i>	10
	D. <i>HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL</i>	10
	E. <i>CAMPUS BASH</i>	10
	F. <i>SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN ECONOMIC GROWTH ALLIANCE (SMEGA)</i>	10
	G. <i>MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (MDOT)</i>	11

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

H. MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (MEDC).....11

I. MICHIANA PARTNERSHIP.....11

J. UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)12

K. SCHOOL PRESENTATION AT DOWAGIAC SCHOOLS, MARCELLUS SCHOOLS AND EDWARDSBURG12

L. SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN PLANNING COMMISSION (SWMPC).....12

M. MIDWEST ENERGY13

N. CONNECT MICHIGAN13

O. SMALL BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER (SBTDC)13

P. SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE (SMC).....14

Q. SCORE COUNSELORS TO SMALL BUSINESS14

R. MSU EXTENSION PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CENTER.....14

S. EDWARD LOWE FOUNDATION.....15

XXII. OUTREACH..... 15

XXIII. ATTRACTION EFFORTS 15

XXIV. 2013 NEW BUSINESS/EXPANSION OF BUSINESS 16

XXV. PRODUCTS MANUFACTURED IN CASS COUNTY 24

XXVI. ADDITIONAL SERVICES IN CASS COUNTY:..... 24

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I. Introduction

This is the second year for the partnership of Cass County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) and LaGrow Consulting 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 and help businesses grow and expand.

Thank you again to the CCEDC for allowing me to serve as the Director for the 2013 year. We have continued to foster relationships with many departments within the County, communities, businesses 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 and business connections the County had to offer existing and new businesses. We provided traditional economic development activities, and non-traditional activities, such as leadership development and business consulting.

I end the year with a great sense of accomplishment and pride in the work that the County has performed. The investment and jobs that we saw created was a direct result of collaboration and cooperation between a number of partners.

As we move into 2014, we need to continue our pro-active approach to business and economic development. I hope that we will continue to see growth and advancement in development.

II. Mission Statement

The Cass County Economic Development Corporation is dedicated to serving the diverse needs of the county, primarily manufacturers, by improving the economic climate and opportunities for business sustainability and growth. We achieve this through projects and programs that provide for savings, expanded employment opportunities and business to business opportunities. We ultimately want to enhance Cass County's long-term prosperity and quality of life for present and future generations.

III. Objectives

Our mission, objectives and goals are aimed at business retention, expansion and 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.

IV. Goals for 2014

- 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 20 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 2013-2014 school year.
- Serve as the County lead for Michiana Partnership
- Develop a video featuring County assets
- Develop an annual Business to Business (B2B) Connect event

V. Website

We made some additional changes to our website including posting our press releases, grant opportunities and pictures of our projects. We need to ensure that our website is current with up to date information available to people as they search for information and available sites. Thanks to Kerry Collins for assisting the CCEDC with our web changes.

VI. Local Communities

The CCEDC continues to work with local communities on issues of business support, expansion and grant availability.

VII. Chamber of Commerce

Updates were given on the progress of the CCEDC at the Edwardsburg Chamber of Commerce and the Cassopolis/Vandalia Chamber of Commerce. As we move into 2014, I want to ensure there is a stronger relationship with the Chambers in case a business needs some assistance.

VIII. 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 while nurturing local businesses. In addition to our commitment to recruit new businesses, the CCEDC recognizes the importance of keeping local businesses healthy and viable.

I met with existing business owners and had one-on-one counseling and review of their business wants and needs. I was able to make determinations on what programs or resources could help each business. This served as an opportunity to learn more about their businesses, and see if there is 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 37 key manufacturing companies in the County. Some of the visits to companies required multiple meetings, phone calls and emails. Through my visits, I was able to assist with electricity needs, supplier concerns, human resource issues, marketing needs, air quality permits, wastewater treatment issues, financing issues and zoning issues. All of this resulted in the creation of over 244 jobs for 2013

IX. MEDC Marketing Trip

I traveled to New York City and Chicago to work with 25 site consultants and educated them on the development opportunities in Cass County. I was able to do a 10 minute presentation in front of each consultant and have remained in contact with the consultants to date.

X. MEDA Conference

I attended the Michigan Economic Developers Association conference in August. The conference is a means to network with colleagues and state officials. In addition, it fulfills the requirements to obtain continuing education credits needed each year for my Certified Economic Developers Certificate.

XI. St. Joseph County Tourism

The CCEDC has been working to determine another mechanism for funding marketing for the County. Several years ago St. Joseph County approached Cass County and wanted us to join their efforts to grow the region. We declined then, however, now we need to partner with another agency as our resources are scarce but we want to grow.

XII. Pay it Forward Campaign

The CCEDC approved moving forward with a “Pay it Forward” Campaign. This is a campaign where businesses can ask their patrons to “round up” their purchase to either the nearest dollar or half dollar. This would be a volunteer program; however, the companies who choose to participate will then be rewarded with increased marketing efforts. Our plan is to roll out this program in 2014.

XIII. Resources

A. Edwardsburg CIA

The Village of Edwardsburg and Ottawa Township created a Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA) in 2012. I have been working with the County Equalization Director and the CIA to determine how they can use the CIA to enhance development in the Edwardsburg area.

B. George’s Café

George’s Café opened a new restaurant in Cassopolis. George also expanded service in Porter Township to add liquor sales and a possible second location. The CCEDC provided economic impact materials for the Porter Township Planning Commission and Township Board.

C. Fairground Grant

I provided Gail Peterson information on grant funding for the fairground.

D. Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) – Edwardsburg Ambulance

The Ambulance contacted me to help write language for the AFG. They are looking to purchase a new ambulance.

E. Howard Township Hall

Provided grant assistance to Teri at the hall.

F. Business Purchase

I was contacted by a local resident who is looking to purchase an existing business. He wants to be able to buy a business in Cass County considering he lives here. He is looking for a manufacturing business at this time. I have some leads for him and want to ensure that the business stays in Cass County and grows.

XIV. Norfolk Southern Railroad

We are working with the railroad to install a rail spur in the Dowagiac Industrial Park. Norfolk Southern is ready to partner with a new company; however we need the approval of Amtrak. Amtrak is hesitant to work toward more industrial traffic as they increase their speeds on the passenger side.

XV. Canadian National (CN) Railroad

CN is working on several areas in Cass County to improve their tracks and crossing as well as install a new spur in the Cassopolis Industrial Park.

XVI. Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)

I participated in the JAG conference where eight schools including Coloma, Potterville, Benton Harbor, Muskegon, Niles, Sturgis, Covert and Cassopolis competed in various events that relate to a variety of careers. Public speaking, interviews, debate, marketing campaigns, and team building skills were all a part of this event that gave the students exposure to what life could be like after high school and some of the jobs that a student might be able to obtain such as engineering, nursing, etc. There were over 150 students at the event.

XVII. Job Fair at Dowagiac Michigan Works (Kinexus)

Kinexus planned a job fair event at their office in Dowagiac for Cass County companies. We had 120 people come to the fair looking for work. Most of the attendees were unemployed, however some did have jobs but felt underemployed.

XVIII. Edwardsburg Expo

The CCEDC was represented at the expo this year. I manned a booth and talked to attendees about business opportunities in the County. I also met a number of people who were looking for work. I connected those people to possible employers and Kinexus.

XIX. Michiana Supernet (MS)

The Milton Township Board contacted MS to determine if they could provide their residents with last mile connectivity. A number of residents could work remotely; however, without high-speed access many workers are limited in their communication and efficiency. MS is in the process of installing fiber to a number of areas in the Township.

XX. Air National Guard Base – Battle Creek

The Federal Government is analyzing their property and its useful life. There are a number of employees who work at the base as well as training and hangars in Battle

Creek. The base also serves as an emergency shelter and is unique in character. We provided support letters for the Congressional visit in November.

XXI. 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.

A. 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 to New York City and Chicago with SWM1st and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation this year for business attraction efforts. SWM1st sends out Requests for Proposals (RFP) for various projects either new to Michigan or for existing companies within Michigan. Each RFP is specific to a project and has 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.

SWM1st organized monthly meetings of the economic development officials in the eleven county area in order to stay connected. We networked and shared information on the progress or challenges in each county.

B. 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 training and marketing programs to diversify their business. Tri-Pac will be utilizing their services to become ISO certified.

C. Michigan Works (MW) now is Kinexus

Kinexus is a non-profit workforce development organization. Their mission is to provide a skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers. Kinexus has three offices in Southwest Michigan offering services to employers, job seekers, and youth.

We utilized Kinexus for job fairs, hiring assistance, pre-screening for employment, job searches, and job training. Kinexus was invaluable as we worked with Postle Aluminum and Fontijne Formitt on the attraction project.

I gave a formal presentation to the employees of Kinexus on economic development and its many facets to help employees better understand what companies are looking for in today's economy.

D. Human Resource Council

Through a partnership with Michigan Works, we created a Human Resource Council to help assist area employers with filling job openings. The council also tackled issues on insurance, right to work and safety in the workplace.

E. Campus Bash

In partnership with Southwestern Michigan College, the county was involved in Campus Bash again this year. Our purpose for being involved was to access students and educate them on job openings and opportunities in the County.

F. Southwest Michigan Economic Growth Alliance (SMEGA)

The Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance has been partnering with business and community leaders since 1982 to build and support a strong economy throughout Southern Berrien County. Over 30 years later, with an expanded regional focus, they are able to present our community as part of a larger area rich in resources for business growth and development. Their mission is to attract and retain jobs and businesses.

This year we partnered with SMEGA to fulfill Requests for Proposals as well as support for tax abatements and education to the public on economic development initiatives.

G. 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 including Interstate 94.

We are working with MDOT for four company rail expansion projects. For most of the companies that we are talking to, constructing rail will save them a minimum of \$650,000 per year versus trucking goods in or out of their company.

H. 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, 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 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.

I. 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 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 six counties believe that as a region we

have a greater chance to have the critical mass population and suppliers that large manufacturers are looking for in a new location.

J. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The United States Department of Agriculture is the United States 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 2 communities and 1 developer who are actively engaging the USDA programs and 1 developer who closed on his loan with USDA to redevelop a property in Dowagiac to create a movie theater and comedy club.

K. School Presentation at Dowagiac Schools, Marcellus Schools and Edwardsburg

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. We partnered Marcellus Schools with Fabmasters Inc. to discuss manufacturing careers. All students are not 4-year College bound; however they do need post-high school education.

L. 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 in charge of the comprehensive planning for economic development strategy (CEDS). In order to submit a project for a business or municipality for federal funding, the project has to be listed in the CEDS. The CCEDC was part of the CEDS committee along with a variety of other participants including; Jollay Orchards, Honey Bear, Cornerstone Alliance, SMEGA, Kinexus and several more. The CEDS strategy will be finished in the 1st quarter of 2014.

M. Midwest Energy

Midwest Energy is a utility provider in the Cass county area. They strongly encourage our partnership of economic development. I used Midwest energy to help new customers determine their utility costs if they moved to the County.

N. 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 is actively involved in the initiative as well as the City of Dowagiac to provide the last mile connectivity. We still have a lot of work left to do and hopefully this will remain a top priority for the state.

O. Small Business Technology and Development Center (SBTDC)

The Michigan Small Business & Technology Development Center™ (MI-SBTDC™) strengthens Michigan's economic well-being by providing counseling, business education, information based planning and technology commercialization services for new ventures, existing small businesses, second-

stage businesses and advanced technology companies. With offices statewide, the MI-SBTDC positively impacts the economy by strengthening existing companies, creating new jobs, retaining existing jobs, and assisting companies in defining their path to success. The SBTDC partnered with the CCEDC to help bring Tri-Pac's expansion to fruition.

P. 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 campus locations are 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. In addition, SMC traveled to the schools to help with the student presentations.

Q. SCORE Counselors to Small Business

SCORE grows successful small businesses across America, one business at a time. SCORE is a nonprofit association dedicated to helping small businesses get off the ground, grow and achieve their goals through education and mentorship. They have been doing this for nearly fifty years. Because their work is supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and thanks to our network of 11,000+ volunteers, we are able to deliver our services at no charge or at very low cost. Our branch of SCORE is located in the Business Incubator in Cassopolis.

R. 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 four companies to the product center for assistance with broadening their sales and product development.

**** Five new start-ups for 2013****

S. *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.

XXII. Outreach

The Michigan 400 and the Developers Meeting in Detroit are two events that the state of Michigan holds for site consultants and real estate companies. We entertained two different consultants in Cass County. We gave them tours of the area and provided them with samples of goods produced here in our county.

XXIII. Attraction Efforts

We worked with 32 (2 international companies) formal Request for Proposals (RFP) including an R&D company for the Village of Cassopolis. The process for attraction efforts vary greatly. Contacts come from a Site Consultant, State of Michigan, Southwest Michigan 1st, or initiated by the CCEDC. The RFP usually is very specific where a company is looking for a site of X number of acres or a building that is X S.F. The company is also looking for utility and infrastructure related to a site as well. The RFP process turnaround time is usually less than seven days, however the time after to wait for feedback could be up to 18-24 months. Of the RFP’s that we completed this year we will have 9 that have not chosen a location yet. We provided tours for companies/realtors in the county as well as provided in county business consultation for people who wanted to start a business.

This year we were lucky to land two from the RFP process:

Postle Aluminum – Competition

State of Indiana

We competed for the project against Elkhart, IN which is the headquarters for Postle. The company is committed to create 40 jobs and investing \$13,458,789. Postle Aluminum

built a 52,000 S.F. building in the Village of Cassopolis to install a wet coat paint line for their extrusion line to increase their customer base. The company was sending their extrusion pieces for painting with an outside source. This project will allow them to bring the painting back to their facility and offer the paint service to their customers.

Fontijne Formitt-Netherlands – Competition

State of Illinois

We competed for the project with the State of Illinois which already hosts Fontijne in Buffalo Grove. The company purchased the Intellectual Property (IP) of the former Hess Engineering Company. Fontijne is committed to creating 31 jobs and investing \$2,633,000. Fontijne will manufacture catalytic convertors in Milton Township.

XXIV. 2013 New Business/Expansion of Business

Ann’s Bookkeeping	Cassopolis	1 job	
Antique Store	Cassopolis	1 job	
Bentzer	Edwardsburg		
Creative Foam		10 jobs	
Dr. John Hayman New Dental office			\$1,100,000
Enbridge Project			
FabMasters		5 jobs	
Health Clinic in Dowagiac (Dental Clinic)		20 jobs	\$2,822,000
ICM Products (New Ownership)		3 jobs	\$150,000.00
Tagine in Paris - Cassopolis		1 job	
Mennel Milling		3 job	
Modineer acquires Winwright Industries			
MSU Product Center	5 New Businesses	5 jobs(estimate)	
Park Shore Products/Move to a commercial location from home			
Pro Components	Dowagiac	2 jobs	
Shiloh Industries purchased the Con-Tech Building in Wayne Twp			
Shoebox Bookkeeping	Dowagiac	1 job	

Sweet Shop

Edwardsburg 1 job

Cass Family Medical Clinic

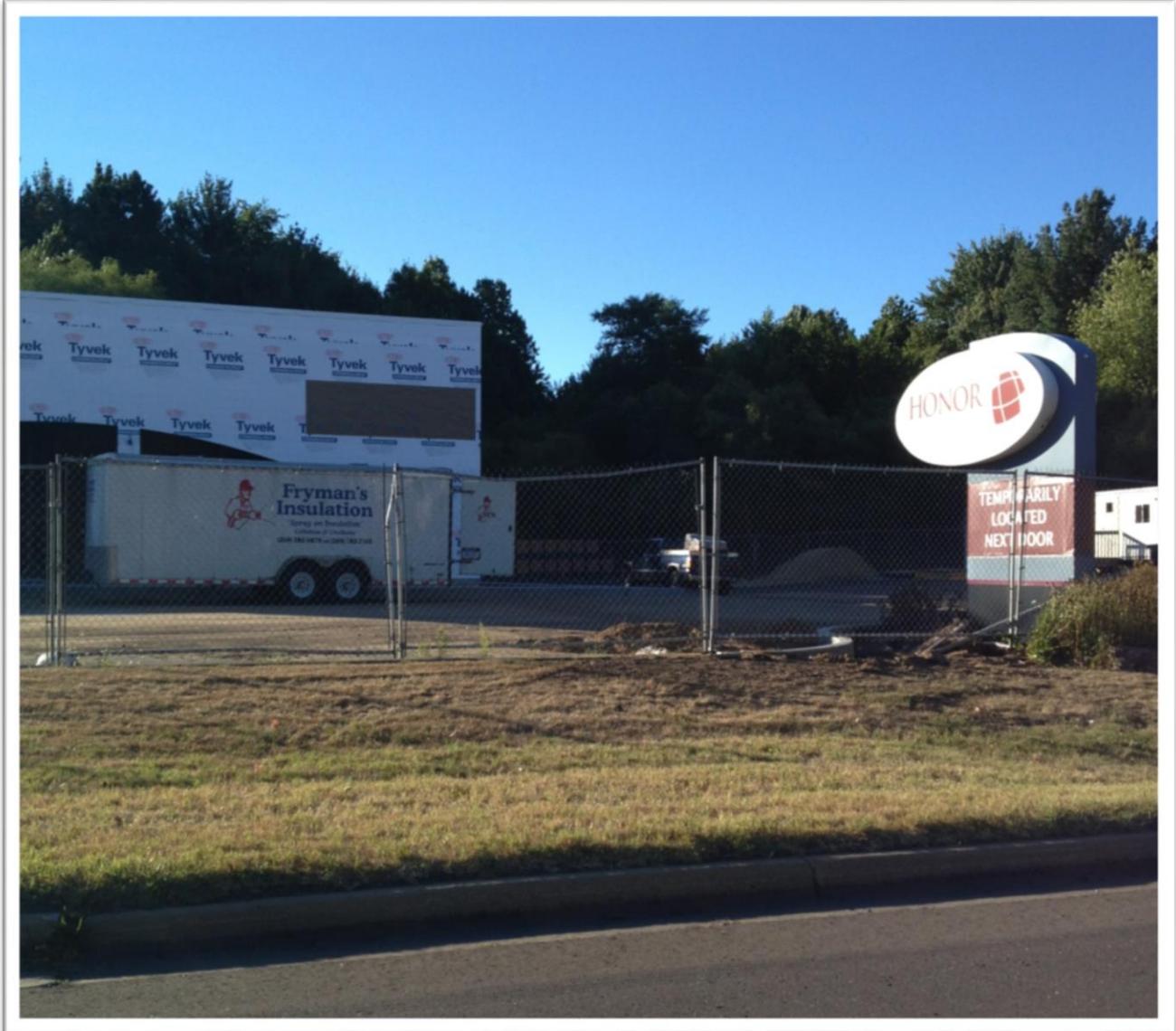
20 jobs

\$6,500,000



Honor Credit Union 56337 M-51 S building

\$740,000



K & M Manufacturing Expansion

4 jobs

\$5,465,000



Lyons Industries

100 jobs

\$2M



Postle Aluminum

40+ jobs

\$13,458,789



Southwestern Michigan College

Renovation

\$3,000,000



Tri Pac Expansion

8 jobs

\$795,252.00



Project Nether (Fontijne Formitt)

31 jobs

\$3,484,000



Pictured from left to right: Joe Sobierlski-SMEGA, Commissioner Bob Ziliak, Milton Township Clerk Sue Kronwitter, Milton Township Supervisor Robert Benjamin, Milton Township Treasurer Susan Flowers, Mike Walker of Fontijne Formitt, Jim Zielinski of Fontijne Formitt, Rich Solloway of Fontijne Formitt, Trustee Sweeney Milton Township

Haas Alarm Systems

4 jobs

\$300,000



26 projects = 360 jobs = \$39,815,041

In addition to the jobs created as listed above, according to the Upjohn Institute, each job would create spin-off jobs or support jobs. Based on the 360 jobs created at our 2.1 job multiplier rate, we would have created another 756 jobs.

XXV. Products Manufactured in Cass County

Baked goods
Bath tubs, sinks, showers made of fiberglass
Braking components
Caulk
Die cast components
Extruded Aluminum Fin tubes, Air Cooled Heat Exchangers, Finning
Flour
Foam Products- Custom formulated for many industries
Foam Interior parts for the automotive industry, aerospace and agriculture
Gun cleaner
Glycerin
Hummingbird Nectar
Lamp oil
Liquid level controls
Metal castings
Molds for manufacturing for items such as cell phone cases, pop or water bottles, etc.
Office s- temporary
Precision plastic parts
Printed paper products
Ready-to-assemble furniture
Recycled vinyl
Recycled materials of tires
Remote control helicopters
Research and development
Rivets
Sand blasting equipment and componentry
Screw machine products manufacturer
Sewn products
Sheet metal and sheet metal products
Solar components
Tool and Die components
Wood Trusses and wood building materials
X-ray machines

XXVI. Additional services in Cass County:

Contract machining
Procurement services
Steel Construction Company
Welding and fabrication, including laser and water cutting.