

Economic development matters for all in Ozaukee County

Welcome to Ozaukee Matters, a new monthly column talking about economic development, the local economy and Ozaukee business snapshots.

I am Kathleen Cady Schilling, executive director of Ozaukee Economic Development. So, what is OED and why should economic development matter to you?

OED was formed in 1989 as a volunteer organization with limited paid staff. The organization focused on how to improve and expand the business community in Ozaukee County. With limited resources, OED had to focus on key issues.

Some of their early work included working with the Ozaukee Express to provide transit into Ozaukee County, creating the Workforce 2010 (now Workforce 2020) Student Internship program and creating partnerships and entrepreneurship programs with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Small Business Development Center.

However, in 2007, OED made the decision to become a more active partner in economic development. OED is now a vital connector of resources, assisting businesses to connect with federal, state and local programs, as well as educational or business resources.

OED works directly with businesses who want to locate or expand within the county, assisting with property searches, finding financial resources and coordinating issues with local municipalities.

Since 2007, OED has worked with 47 business expansions or locations within the county. These projects have seen more than 1,200 new jobs created and helped retain approximately 1,300 jobs within the county.



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In the past 12 months, OED has worked with six businesses, three of which were business expansions and three new businesses to the area. Currently, we are working with 22 potential projects, which could see more than 700 new jobs added to the area. It is OED's goal to be the connection for business growth in the county.

So why should economic development be important to you? Maybe you already have a job in the county, or maybe you live here but either no longer work or work outside of the area. Why should you care what is happening in the business community?

Now, time for some backstory – I grew up in Flint, Mich., Maybe some of you have heard of my hometown – there was a movie made about it, “Roger and Me.” Flint once had one of the highest per capita incomes in the nation. It was a booming town, where jobs were plentiful and disposable income ran high. The only problem – the community was focused on one industry and one company. Work on economic development? What is the point? We are booming.

We all can now see the results of this decision – high unemployment, high foreclosure rates and a decimated downtown. This background help lead me to the field of economic development.

Now, you might be saying, still, how does this affect me? I didn't grow up in Flint and Ozaukee County is never going to run into the same problems. This is true, however, tough times can come to everyone and to every community.

A strong business community helps everyone. Lose your job? A strong business community can provide you with growing businesses in your backyard that are looking for new employees. Hate paying taxes? Most businesses pay more in property taxes than they receive in services, so a strong business community helps keep your taxes down.

OED is committed to maintaining Ozaukee County's business vitality and helping it grow.

Well, there is my background and I am looking forward to talking with you monthly on key issues affecting this community.

OED is holding its Annual Business of the Year/Economic Forecast honoring Ansay & Associates, Johnson Level and Shully's Cuisine and Events on Sept. 24. For more information on this event or to provide comments on this article, contact me at kschilling@co.ozaukee.wi.us.

(Kathleen Cady Schilling is the executive director of Ozaukee Economic Development.)