

Steuben County is moving forward

Posted: Saturday, November 27, 2010 12:00 am

To the editor:

These are exciting times for Steuben County and its economic future.

Several activities are moving forward that bode well for the county, its residents and businesses, and our long term economic development.

As a County Commissioner and chairman of the board of the Steuben County Economic Development Corporation, I wanted to provide our residents with a progress report on several of these important undertakings.

First of all, in July, the Economic Development Corporation adopted a new strategic plan for economic development, which was formally rolled out in August at a public meeting and presentation. This plan has been well-received by the community. I would like to thank all of the residents who had a role in helping develop this plan and the approximately 100 residents who attended the public meeting.

Since the summer we have been working to implement the plan's many initiatives, and several are moving forward:

- Fiber Optic Funding: In September, the County Commissioners approved funding of up to \$2.0 million to pay for the continued development of our iMAN fiber-optic network throughout the county. This will help connect the main hub in Angola to all of our other communities. Fiber-optic systems are an important tool in our economic growth, and are becoming increasingly vital in attracting firms to our area, and to operate in today's data-driven business world. Like sewer and water lines, fiber optics are becoming more of a "basic" requirement for companies looking to locate or expand.
- Redevelopment Commission: Another initiative moving forward is our county-wide Redevelopment Commission. The County Commissioners will soon have before it a resolution creating a Commission. This new Redevelopment Commission will provide us with another tool to address underutilized areas of our county, and provide the public and private sectors with better opportunities to work together to reuse existing properties.

•Trine University: It has been said that one of Indiana’s best secrets is Trine University, and I could not agree more. Trine is proceeding with new facilities and programs that take advantage of our proximity to Warsaw and that area’s huge orthopedics industry. The goal here is for Trine to become a leader in preparing students for that industry as well as the biomedical industry, another segment that is growing in the region.

•Private Sector: Another key partner in our economic development plan lies in the private sector. We are very thankful to have several proposals under consideration that will be primarily funded by the private sector that will create jobs and add tax revenue to our government jurisdictions. Several businessmen and interests are willing to invest in Steuben County’s future, and we are hopeful that these plans will proceed. In the end, it is the private sector that creates the jobs and provides our schools and governments with the tax dollars to deliver our services. There may be some public investment in some of these projects, but the importance of the private sector’s involvement cannot be overstated. •Funding: Steuben County has been fortunate to have received a windfall of sorts from the leasing of the Indiana Toll Road that must be used for economic development purposes. The County Commissioners are responsible for the disbursement of monies from this fund, and are hoping to leverage these dollars with investments from other sources so that we can maximize our return. We have used this fund prudently, and I hope, wisely. The recently approved \$2.0 million for the iMAN fiber optic project will come from this fund. As an example of our prudence, the County Commissioners required that 20 percent of all connection fees paid to iMAN be earmarked back to the county, which will be set aside in a fund held by the Community Foundation.

There are other areas that we are working on such as better promotion of our tourism industry and agricultural assets, long term development of our rail lines and airport, and the diversification of our manufacturing enterprises, as well as some education-related initiatives to ensure that our residents are qualified and “ready” to work. The county is also fortunate to have an interstate running through it, and this may offer some long term development opportunities as well. Some of these initiatives and undertakings will be easy to achieve; others may prove to be more difficult. The point is that we do have a plan with action steps, goals and benchmarks, and we are working to ensure that we move forward on as many of these as we can.

Sincerely

F. Mayo Sanders