

Economic Development Insight

GCEDC Mission

People I meet very frequently ask me what economic development is, and what exactly is Greene County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) doing for the county. GCEDC's mission is to foster an environment that will create jobs, increase the tax base and improve the quality of life for Greene County residents.

In simple terms, jobs are created (and maintained) when a business is retained, expanded or attracted. The tax base is increased by the property taxes paid on real estate (business and residential), the personal property a business owns (equipment), sales and any other taxes levied. The quality of life is improved when the residents have more spendable income because they have quality jobs and the government is using the increased taxes to maintain and improve the infrastructure and environment. But, all this is the end result.

So, how do we get there? It's similar to a potential business owner, who starts his or her business development process by identifying a need, creating a product or service to meet that need, developing a business and marketing plan, analyzing the production costs and potential profit margins, purchasing equipment, setting up a location, etcetera. In other words, by establishing and building upon a firm foundation, so that the work will be profitable.

GCEDC uses a format that outlines an effective process for community and economic development in four progressive stages or levels: 1) community identity, 2) organizational ability, 3) development readiness, and 4) diversification. The process requires a team effort including many community agencies and much public input.

Level one includes activities such as community assessment, leadership development, partnership-building, general planning, and capital improvement programs. At level two, attention is given to developing a long-term economic development strategy, workforce, housing, infrastructure development, and business finance and assistance. Level three focuses on tourism, downtown development or revitalization, promoting business retention and supporting start-ups. By the time a community has attained level four, it is now truly prepared for strategic industry attraction, and so, business expansions, external marketing, new business locates and global markets will become the primary focus.

Most of Greene County's efforts are at the level one stage, with a few progressive exceptions, such as launching entrepreneurship (level two), tourism (level three), and the (level 4) WestGate@Crane technology park and the diversification of NSWC Crane . These efforts also

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involve regional partners and currently include a marketing brochure for the entire Crane region and identifying the quantities and skill sets needed for the present and future regional workforce.

Besides the exceptions though, the basic, foundational goals include creating a business-friendly environment, developing a trained and ready workforce, and diversifying the industrial base (so that there will be plenty of jobs needing a variety of skills.) The strategies GCEDC has created to help accomplish those goals are ones that have proven effective for rural environments.

Greene County's current strategies include development of entrepreneurship, youth and leadership, and increasing local investment. These are being addressed through the HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) initiative, as Greene County was successful in becoming one of only nine pilot communities selected by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA).

Also included is infrastructure development, such as Interstate 69, the WestGate@Crane technology park, plus the planning necessary to provide for industrial and commercial development while maintaining Greene County's rural integrity.

Finally, it's important to capitalize on local assets, such as agriculture, NSWC Crane, and the abundant outdoor recreation opportunities anchored by the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area. This applies the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach.

Even though Greene County is not yet at level four, ready for concentrated business attraction efforts, GCEDC is still involved in this activity. Whenever a state or regional partner is working with a relocating business that has identified criteria Greene County can meet, GCEDC responds to that lead with details about potential sites and/or buildings and information that addresses any other needs or concerns the company specifies. The goal is to stay in the competition (against other locations being considered) for as long as possible and, ultimately, become the location of choice for that company. To do this, timely response and accurate information is essential.

Future articles will address the various strategies and provide more detailed information on the progress GCEDC and our community partners are making.

Joan Bethell is the executive director at Greene County Economic Development Corporation and can be reached at (812) 847-4500 or jbethell@gcedc.us.