

Economic Development Insight

Networking is Key

By Brianne Perigo

In January 2009, I attended the week-long Indiana Economic Development Basic Course at Ball State University. The course “Building Better Communities” was facilitated by Dick Heupel who is the Director of Economic/CD and ED Course Director at Ball State University. Dick Heupel and his staff did a fantastic job of engaging the class in a getting to know you exercise that enabled us to make connections with our classmates over the next five days.

Each morning, after the continental breakfast, we were to sit at different tables so we could network effectively, exchange business cards and so on. I made it my personal quest to make contact with each and every one of my fellow classmates, (I met 72 out of 82 participants in five days; so I almost reached my goal). My point is the course outlined all of these wonderful presentations and activities and neglected to mention the most invaluable resource to a career in economic development...the connections.

Aside from expanding my contact list, the course had many experienced and informative presenters. The presentation list ranged from strategic planning to neighborhood development to the site selection process. I’ll pause there for a moment. This topic interested me the most because the information the presenter provided was so valuable. It was almost as if she was giving us the inside scoop on what really goes on during the site selection process.

Kate McEnroe is the President of her consulting firm, Kate McEnroe Consulting. For an hour she discussed site selection projects in terms of who is looking and how they decide which community has “it”. What I found particularly interesting is that a community will not even know that they are being “looked at” as a possibility until the final steps.

What I mean is, a consultant could be researching Greene County from a lounge chair in Naples, Florida and we would have no way of knowing. This is why withholding information is a bad strategy. Consultants, like Kate McEnroe, have an obligation to find information even if the community makes it difficult for them. The information that Greene County has out there to market itself is very sparse and I would venture to say that we get passed up quite a bit.

To remedy the situation, my Citizen’s Academy group chose to build a database of community assets that will help market Greene County and will enable GCEDC to respond quickly to any leads. The database will be on-going and ever changing. For now, we need manpower to help get it put together. After the Citizen’s Academy graduation, Ron Toon pulled me aside and said, “Brianne, getting this database built will put us light years ahead of other communities.”

Does Greene County Economic Development Corporation want to see our beautiful rural community mutate into a metropolitan or industry saturated nightmare? Absolutely not. We do, however, want Greene County to be seriously considered during the site selection process by a company that will bring good paying jobs to our hard working citizens.

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In the future, I will be sent to different courses and seminars to learn as much as I can about the inner workings of economic development. What's the point in attending if I don't come back and share my experiences with my fellow Greene Countians?

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