

\$2.6 Million Raised For REDE

Wisconsin State Journal :: BUSINESS :: C8

Wednesday, February 7, 2007

NATHAN LEAF nleaf@madison.com 608-252-6126

In front of dozens of government officials and business leaders Tuesday afternoon at the Dane County Regional Airport, the Collaboration Council said it has exceeded its fundraising goal of \$2.4 million to fund the Regional Economic Development Entity for the first three years. The group also announced its leadership and initial board.

Tapping 157 donors, the group has raised \$2.6 million while Jennifer Alexander, president of the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, has been selected to lead REDE while continuing her duties at the chamber. Last month, the state awarded REDE a \$270,000 grant to be paid over two years.

The organization's goals are to expand the region's economy by sector, address quality of life issues and promote the regional culture, Alexander said.

Alexander believes there already are a lot of groups in the region generating good economic development ideas. REDE's job is to bring them all together.

"In my estimation, what's been lacking is focus and leveraging all of those fine ideas," she said.

The organization will operate with five to seven employees out of the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce at 615 E. Washington Ave., with an annual budget of \$800,000. In addition to paying for staff, the money will be used for a regional Web site, collaborative initiatives with other organizations, research, brand development and marketing.

The board members announced Tuesday are Terri Potter (chair), Potter Consulting; Deb Archer, Greater Madison Convention & Visitors Bureau; Jon Bales, DeForest Area School District; John Biondi, C5-6 Technologies; Dave Boyer, MCD Inc.; Ed Clarke, Madison Area Technical College; Kristen Cogswell AT&T; Mark Cullen, J.P. Cullen & Sons; Carl Gulbrandsen, Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation; TerA Johnson, Steele Ventures; Tom Lyon, Cooperative Resources International; Sonya Newenhouse, Madison Environmental Group; Paul Percy, UW--Madison, College of Engineering; Robert Rodriguez, Kraft Foods; Winslow Sargeant, Venture Investors; Tom Spitz, SB Bancorp; Trevor Twose, Mithridion Inc. and Biopons Inc.; Bill White, Michael Best & Friedrich; and Gary Wolter, Madison Gas & Electric.

Potter said the time is right for REDE because business and government leaders have begun to realize they need to grow with the region in mind, rather than just their local municipalities.

"We're going to bring everyone together around a common agenda," Potter said. "We've got tremendous resources and tremendous assets in this region, but we've got a history of

parochialism. ... We want this to grow in a way that preserves the features of this environment and this community."

Among Potter's goals for REDE's first year are developing regional guiding principles, developing a regional Web site and rebranding the organization. Finding continued funding will be a concern the board will have to examine, said Potter, who was a co-chair on the Collaboration Council.

County Executive Kathleen Falk said creating the organization with a regional rather than just a county focus, as was found in the original plan, is important because south-central Wisconsin's population has become less centralized.

"We have a fast-growing population and a very healthy economy," she said. "What can happen is you can lose those quality-of-life attributes that bring and keep people here. ... It's important that we make sure our future is the best of both worlds (and develop) a growing economy for everyone up the economic ladder."