



EDITORIAL: Joining forces for the future

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Plan today for tomorrow's improved economy.

IT SEEMS TOO OBVIOUS, that the future for communities in Rock County — for that matter, communities up and down the Interstate 90 corridor, including just across the line in Illinois — are inextricably linked. All will prosper and go forward together.

Or none will prosper.

Many years ago, perhaps, that wasn't as obvious. Communities were more insulated within their own borders, and the economy was more localized.

No more. The fate of the region is tied tightly together, as the global economy drives the competitiveness of the marketplace. The need has never been greater for not only regional cooperation, but even more so for a coordinated and well funded plan of action.

IT'S CALLED "Rock County 5.0," and it is specifically designed to address the need for a strong regional effort on the economic development front.

The plan was rolled out this week, headed by co-chairs Diane Hendricks of ABC Supply Co. and Mary Willmer-Sheedy of M&I Bank.

To state the obvious, the challenges facing Rock County spurred the effort. The closing of General Motors in Janesville sent shock waves throughout the region, and resulted in the loss of other related businesses. To make matters worse, the serious economic downturn occurring worldwide sparked further job losses across the area.

And, really, it's fair to say the area has been digging hard to re-position ever since the collapse of Beloit Corporation several years ago. The loss of any large employer has ripple effects for a long, long time.

BUT AS MRS. HENDRICKS said at the roll-out, tough news sometimes can be the spark that results in re-examining opportunities to build positive outcomes. The challenges worked to bring together diverse interests from both the public and private sectors to form the Rock County 5.0 partnership.

The goal is to raise a million dollars, which will be used by existing government-sponsored development experts to gather new data, identify the best opportunities and build specific targeted strategies to grow the local economy. The ultimate goal is to position Rock County in a state of readiness to anticipate and meet the needs of potential investors when the economy — as it will — eventually starts humming again.

Rock County 5.0 is envisioned as a five-year plan — backed by top business leaders across the county — which is really all about jobs. What is needed to keep the jobs we have? How can existing companies be helped, and be encouraged to expand and grow here? What are the jobs of the future and what will be the growth industries? What will developers and investors

need to know about us? What's the most effective way to deliver that information? What will they need to streamline planning and permitting? What kind of training will help the local workforce be prepared?

IT'S A BIG JOB — too big for Beloit, or Janesville, or Clinton, or Milton, or Edgerton.

Get the idea?

It's not too big for a regional effort, which brings the talent and resources of Rock County to bear on the issues. This can work. It can help point the way from today's worries toward tomorrow's prosperity.

Obviously, this is just the beginning. The foundation is being built. Lots of planning and process remains to be accomplished.

But it's a great idea. It deserves the strong support of the people, their governmental representatives and the private-sector business community.

Sure, times are tough. But they won't get better without a positive attitude and a plan. There's comfort in knowing, now, we're all in this together.