



## **Six Months in, Rock County 5.0 Shows Progress**

**By Hillary Gavan**

[hgavan@beloitdailynews.com](mailto:hgavan@beloitdailynews.com)

Published: Thursday, July 8, 2010 1:29 PM CST

Although it was launched just six months ago, Rock County 5.0 is making progress marketing the region, helping budding entrepreneurs and strengthening existing business relationships.

Rock County 5.0 co-chairs Diane Hendricks, owner of ABC Supply Co., and Mary Wilmer-Sheedy, community bank president of M&I Bank, joined Beloit Economic Development Director Andrew Janke, Janesville Economic Development Director Vic Grassman and Rock County Economic Development Director James Otterstein for an update briefing met with the Beloit Daily News on Wednesday.

Rock County 5.0 is a five-year public-private initiative to advance Rock County's economic development vision through a single voice. Support for Rock County 5.0 derives predominately from the private sector. Rock County 5.0's strategies include: business retention and expansion, business and investment attraction, small business and entrepreneurship, real estate positioning and workforce profiling.

Rock County 5.0 already has raised \$1.2 million, exceeding its initial \$1 million goal, which Hendricks said speaks to the commitment of large as well as small businesses. In addition to a budget, which has monumentally surpassed small city and county economic development allowances, Rock County 5.0 has been able to take advantage of new marketing opportunities through its unique private and public partnership.

For example, Rock County 5.0 is offering a program on the county's assets, which is on a computer thumb drive. The thumb drive is given away at trade shows, conventions and more. The program helps counteract the negative headlines about high unemployment rates in Rock County to tout the county's other assets such as proximity to larger markets, the transportation corridor of Interstates 43 and 39/90, a regional airport, a skilled workforce, a favorable bond rating and more.

Recently the thumb drives were passed out by Rock County 5.0 representatives at the International Council of Shopping Centers annual show in Las Vegas. Existing companies with Rock County 5.0 also have been handing out the tiny thumb drive at conventions and trade shows to help spread the word. By partnering with existing companies, Otterstein said Rock County 5.0 is able to market itself efficiently at a very low cost. Those who receive the thumb drives are directed to [www.rockcountyalliance.com](http://www.rockcountyalliance.com), a "yellow book" of business information on the region.

Rock County 5.0 also sent direct marketing packets to 6,000 food processing companies in April and will be targeting plastics, logistics, advanced manufacturing as well as medical and healthcare industries.

Janke said the Rock County 5.0 real estate profiling efforts are paying off already. The entire Gateway Business Park and one large Janesville site are close to becoming site certified, meaning an interested business would be able to close on a property within 30 days. Hendricks said it's not unusual for companies to have to wait six months to a year in order to get permits to build, and site certification will make the region highly attractive to businesses looking to move quickly on a project.

The group's business plan contest has also been a big success. Twenty-one existing small businesses and/or emerging entrepreneurial interests are enrolled in the Accelerate Your Business Plan contest. The winner of the contest will receive a prize package, which includes cash and in-kind business services, valued up to \$25,000. The contest involves a series of structured workshops and one-on-one mentoring sessions. In addition to Rock County 5.0, twelve area businesses have pledged support. Meanwhile, numerous individuals and businesses are providing contest mentoring and/or judging panel services.

Wilmer-Sheedy said the energy level among participants is high. By surrounding entrepreneurs and their budding dreams and visions with the appropriate resources, she said they can be more successful, adding that most businesses start small.

Rock County 5.0 is also helping existing companies with customer diversification assessments by teaming up with the Wisconsin Innovation Service Center. Six manufacturers are in the process of finding new products to make or markets to pursue. "It's a very customized and high end service people are getting at fraction of the cost as they would in the private sector," Otterstein said.

Rock County 5.0 is using workforce profiling to get area educational institutions to offer the training workers need to find jobs. Wage and benefit surveys are being completed to offer prospective employers information on the affordability and high skill sets of Rock County workers.

Later in the summer, Rock County 5.0 is looking forward to Wisconsin's Competitiveness and Positioning Study, sponsored by the Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Economic Development Association and Competitive Wisconsin. The study is being conducted by a third party firm and will be used as a blueprint for improving the state economy. Otterstein added that more than 30 other states are hosting such studies in hopes of creating a better business climate resulting in more jobs and economic growth.

For more information visit the website [www.rockcounty5.com](http://www.rockcounty5.com).