

GLCEDC

CEO feels it has been a good year

By Paul Westermeyer

Staff Reporter

Perhaps the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council is not as known of a quantity as it should be: CEO Adam Dontz sent out a release at the end of October, listing the progress the group has made providing opportunities to the area, including the recently approved \$1.5 million economic development item for the County Board's budget at its Oct. 13 meeting.



Adam Dontz

When reached for comment, Dontz had nothing but positive projections for the future of the local economy — a reversal of fortunes and trends plaguing the wider state.

In October, Dontz said that the GLCEDC had “provided financial assistance to employers responsible for 1,273 jobs in Livingston County and spearheaded a campaign to create Livingston County’s first uniform property tax abatement, which is signed by 19 taxing jurisdictions.” Since that abatement’s Jan. 2015 approval, Dontz said that incentives in the plan had been “structured to retain and create up to 940 jobs and over 31,000 square feet of building expansion.”

The largest headline success that the GLCEDC had was its role in facilitating the \$1.6 million job retention agreement with Caterpillar and a number of municipal bodies, including the County Board.

However, Dontz points out other successes that his organization has had, including the addition of “over 31,000 square feet of building expansion has collectively occurred at RKO Saw & Tool in Cullom and at Selig Sealing in Forrest. This has contributed to the retention of over 175 jobs and creation of approximately 10 new jobs.”

A key to the GLCEDC’s success in Dontz’s mind is how competition is viewed; he said

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that he believes that Livingston County is not merely competing with local municipal entities, nor neighboring states like Indiana and Michigan, but globally as well, and keeping that in perspective has helped him maintain a keen competitive sense.

On how the GLCEDC has been instrumental in some of the county's recent successes, Dontz said that creating partnerships between the public and private sectors for the betterment of the residents was crucial.

The GLCEDC recognizes that the private sector is ultimately responsible for job creation and capital investment," he stated. "That said, I've been working to build a coalition of support among municipalities, schools and Livingston County to ensure we retain and expand existing businesses and attract new businesses, too.

"Our local elected officials and administrators have been excellent

partners in our successes job creation and expansion initiatives with Anthony LiftGates, Caterpillar, RKO Saw & Tool, Selig and others."

Though the GLCEDC's efforts have been seen by a wide majority of local officials as having been beneficial, there are those that remain skeptical. At the Oct. 13 County Board meeting, member Carolyn Gerwin voted against the \$1.5 million measure, referencing a memo she'd written to Board members as the rationale.

The memo had stated that "the extra \$1.5 million economic incentive program through GLCEDC should be put on hold until we have established a vision, clear goals and a timeline and process to achieve it."

Dontz, however, downplayed the skepticism as "very limited."

"Historically, the GLCEDC's proposals have been approved by supermajorities from municipalities, schools and the county," he said. Dontz added that there were specific criteria for the money to be used, and that any proposals he might field would go through the necessary legal channels of approval.

"There's a widespread consensus that we should budget for economic development and review the merits of any petition as brought forth throughout the year as opposed to asking petitions to return the following year if funding is available for their project," he said.

Ultimately, Dontz maintained an optimistic outlook for Livingston County's potential and further economic growth on the horizon.

"Livingston County is home to the intersection of the BNSF and NS and the UP and NS — class one railroads with excellent interstate access," he said. "Additionally, the City of Pontiac has approximately 80 acres near the intersection of I-55 and Route 116; these are strategic greenfield development opportunities.

"We also have several companies that produce goods for consumers throughout the region, nation, and world. The greater Livingston County area is poised for growth and Livingston County's commitment to economic development with pay meaningful dividends to area residents."