

Thank you for your ongoing support of the work of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council. This quarterly results report is the first in our second year of *Rockforward!*, and I am pleased that - in spite of the economic downturn - we continue to realize significant investments in the Rockford Region. In the first quarter of 2009, RAEDC staff and partners managed 49 active retention/expansion and attraction projects, and we celebrated the announcement that one of China's leading companies, Wanxiang, will build its first American solar-panel manufacturing plant in Rockford, creating 60 new jobs. The groundbreaking for Wanxiang will take place later this year, they may expand to 240 employees in the near future, and there are plans to build one of the largest solar farms in the United States in Rockford.

In addition to our work with the Country of China, our **Targeted Marketing and Recruitment** strategy is focused on one of our region's primary target industries - aerospace. Company executives from leading aerospace manufacturers recently came together to strategize how we can improve our infrastructure for the aerospace industry and grow the cluster within the Rockford Area. As a result, the RAEDC has been invited by the State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to market our region's assets at the Paris Airshow in June. Efforts continue with the Country of Sweden, as well, as a delegation from Lidköping met with Rockford Area companies, promoting a cost-effective way of establishing international sales support. The RAEDC recently welcomed its third trainee from Sweden, Katarina Kilter, who will be working out of our offices for the next 12 months. And, the Rockford Area was selected to host the International BioEnergy Days in 2010, which will draw more than 400 attendees from numerous countries.

The RAEDC has also worked aggressively with regional partners to bring additional economic development tools to the Rockford Area, which enhances our ability to create a **World-Class Business Infrastructure**. We have organized a newly-formed committee to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Federal Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). A CEDS is required for our region to apply for EDA funds, so the creation of a CEDS for Boone and Winnebago counties will enable us to leverage federal resources.

We know that existing businesses are our best prospects for new job creation and are our best ambassadors to the global marketplace. Ongoing efforts to sustain and strengthen a **Thriving Business Climate** in our region include learning what our employers need to be more successful by conducting Voice of the Customer Surveys with company leaders. 12 surveys were completed in the first quarter, and plans are on track to complete 100 in 2009. The RAEDC also hosted the first Manufacturing Coffee Talk of the year, wherein City of Rockford Mayor Morrissey led a focused discussion with over 35 area manufacturers.

When addressing **Workforce Development** challenges, we know that knowledge workers are a community's most significant assets. The RAEDC's first quarter investor event focused on regional collaborations to attract and retain talent to the Rockford Area and to connect young professionals. Highlights included the Rockford Area Career Clearinghouse, which launched its new interactive website (rockfordareacareers.com) designed to connect college students and recent graduates to Rockford Area employers, and the new regional young professionals organization - IGNITE - which was officially launched and a new full-time executive director was hired. Results from the 2008 Jobapalooza professional career fair were also announced, which included over 100 interviews and over 15 hires to date.

13 Investment Proposals were submitted in the first quarter by *Rockforward!* Leadership Council members for seed money from the 2009 **Emerging Opportunities Fund**, and Leadership Council members will meet in May to invest in one or two projects. The 2008 Annual Report was published in March, and RAEDC newsletters were sent to target audiences, as well.

Although the economy has slowed, the RAEDC continues to see an increase in client projects and activities. Now, more than ever, your continued support is needed to ensure we successfully carry out the *Rockforward!* multi-year plan and realize its goals. You can count on the RAEDC to focus resources on strategic opportunities that will have a profound impact on our region.

Best Regards,



Janyce Fadden, President, Rockford Area Economic Development Council