



Welcome to your first report on the progress of Rockforward!, the Rockford Area Economic Development Council's new five-year strategic plan. Although only a few months into the first year, I am pleased to report several exciting developments that advance economic development in our region.

Most of our daily work is directly with clients, and for the first quarter we report that 17 projects were initiated. In addition, the staff prepared and presented to over 300 attendees at the first quarter investor meeting our 2007 Voice of the Customer report, which aggregates the voice of 85 local companies representing more than 8,500 employees.

As I write this report, we recently concluded the "Go Global or Get Left Behind" two-day event, wherein global trade specialists offered focused seminars on how local businesses can increase results through exporting and importing. Over 75 participants made for an outstanding event. International outreach efforts will continue to play a vital role in our region's future. Within the past few months, we traveled to Sweden, hosted a delegation from Sweden, and participated in Swedish-American Chambers of Commerce trade shows in Chicago and San Diego. We also met with the Chinese consulate in Chicago to lay the groundwork for a shared industrial and cultural investment strategy, including a trade mission to China. You are invited to stop by our office this summer, as we will be home to two interns from Lidköping, Sweden, and two interns who speak and write fluent Chinese. We are honored to engage them in this innovative work.

Harnessing the global economy, however, will not be possible unless we attract and retain more young talent to our region. For this reason, the RAEDC has invested in the region's Attracting & Retaining Talent to the Rockford Area efforts, including events like LiveBig Weekend and the Jobapalooza Professional Career Fair, as well as an effort to launch a new broad-based Young Professionals Organization. We're confident that these efforts will help make the Rockford region a top career destination for up-and-coming professionals.

The success of our region's economic development is also inextricably tied to infrastructure improvements. In addition to investing in our roads, studies show that commuter rail can serve as a catalyst for development. To further this goal, we recently facilitated the Tri-State Alliance's summit, uniting over 200 private and public sector leaders from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin around regional infrastructure needs. I also serve on the Northern Illinois Commuter Transportation Initiative, and the project team recently made an important decision on a preferred high-speed rail route.

The Rockforward! Leadership Council convened during the first quarter to determine priorities for investment from this year's Emerging Opportunities Fund – \$175,000 of discretionary capital – to leverage positive change. The council agreed on four main priorities for investment: Publicly Supported Education; Leverage Transportation Access; Energy Alternatives & Green Development; and Regional Collaboration. Throughout the remainder of the year, I fully expect the Leadership Council to make expeditious and decisive investments to address their priorities.

By continually focusing our efforts on aggressive business retention and expansion, targeted marketing and recruitment, workforce development, and infrastructure development – together – we are preparing the Rockford Region to compete in today's global marketplace. Your support of our organization is appreciated, and I look forward to seeing you at the June 27 investor meeting.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janyce Fadden".

Janyce Fadden

President, Rockford Area Economic Development Council