

Developments

Helping Employers Retain & Create Quality Jobs Rockford, Illinois USA

Sweden Update: Successful More Opportunities to Come



Dave Barber, CEO of W.A. Whitney, said his company has many growth opportunities as a result of his going on the trade mission to Sweden last year. Photo: Mike Graham

"Lots of future business possibilities, absolutely," said Dave Barber, CEO of W. A. Whitney in Rockford, a metal-forming equipment manufacturer, of the trade mission to Sweden undertaken by the Rockford Area Economic Development Council in 2006. "It really opened my eyes and provided clear answers on how to penetrate the market," he added. The trade mission's goal was to create quality business opportunities for Rockford area employers, by building on historical and existing economic ties of Rockford and Sweden.

Barber has followed up with the contacts he made during the trade mission and is optimistic about the outcomes. "It (trade mission) was a tremendous value for the investment," he said.

One Early Success

Seeing concrete results from trade missions can often take years, but a Swedish high-tech company, Radius, has already chosen Rockford as its U.S. headquarters and held a ribbon-cutting news conference on Feb. 22. It will eventually employ two dozen people with an average wage of \$20 to \$30 per hour plus benefits. The company makes remote-control products for wireless applications that are used by utilities worldwide.

The general manager of the facility, Steve Sendele, learned that Rockford was actively seeking high-tech Swedish business partners. "I was impressed. It's very forward looking for Rockford to do this because there are a lot of good high-tech Swedish companies out there," he said. The company had been looking for a site in the Chicago suburbs and selected the Rockford area.



More than 50 business and community leaders attended the Feb. 22 ribbon cutting for Radius, a high-tech Swedish company that will create two dozen quality jobs. L-R U.S. Congressman Don Manzullo, RAEDC President Janyce Fadden, Radius CEO Hans Ottosson from Karlskrona, Sweden, Winnebago County Chairman Scott Christiansen and Rockford Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey. Photo: Mike Graham

Other Opportunities

- The RAEDC is coordinating five additional business opportunities as a result of the trade mission. Also, several local manufacturers are exploring leads based on contacts they made on the trade mission.
- Participating in the annual Entrepreneurial Days (E-Days), an annual trade show organized by the Swedish-American Chambers of Commerce (SACC) was a focal point of the trade mission. A Rockford-area delegation will take part in the 2007 E-Days in Sweden, once again taking advantage of the business matchmaking meetings and seminars.
- Every other year, SACC holds an E-Day in the United States and in 2007 it will be held in Chicago, on April 18. On April 19 and 20, as part of the Chicago E-days, SACC will hold two Regional Days in Rockford focusing on Logistics Cluster and Automotive-Production Technology Cluster. More than 200 people will visit our region for this event. They will hear from local industry leaders and visit our plants. "This will be an important opportunity to showcase the Rockford area to key international business decision makers," said Janyce Fadden, RAEDC president.
- In addition, three delegations from Sweden will be in Rockford from April 19-22 to learn more about our region.
- To get involved in the Sweden project as a volunteer or a sponsor, please contact Janyce Fadden.

The trade mission was made possible in part by a grant from the Small Business Administration chaired by U.S. Congressman Don Manzullo (R-16th District) and through members' investments.

Area Gains Corporate Headquarter

The Rockford area will gain 45 quality jobs in June when Watt Publishing Co. moves its corporate office from Mount Morris to 303 North Main Street in downtown Rockford. WATT is an international business-to-business information company in the agrifood, pet food and woodworking industries. It delivers its content, data and research information through a variety of media platforms including trade publications, web seminars, in-person events, online products and more to readers in over 150 countries. [www. WattNet.com](http://www.WattNet.com).



Greg Watt, president and CEO of WATT, will move his company from Mount Morris to Rockford this summer.

\$60,000 Salaries

They will occupy the fifth floor of the building once known as the Gas and Electric Building and now houses the corporate offices of SupplyCore. The average salary of a WATT employee is \$60,000 plus benefits. The firm plans to add five new employees and five interns this year. The 12,000 sq. ft. office will have a loft atmosphere with high ceilings and an open floor plan.

“Our growth will come from our online media operations. We needed to be in a larger metropolitan area like Rockford for access to talent which will fuel our growth,” said Greg Watt, president and CEO of WATT. **“That’s where we’ll find web-savvy, creative people who want to work for a fast-moving company. Also, Rockford’s broadband availability and better access to vendor partners played a role in our decision,”** he added.

“We’re looking forward to our move. Our people want to get involved in the community. I expect we will become members of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council,” said Watt.

WATT has 87 employees through the United States, the UK and The Netherlands.

Founded in 1917, the company is celebrating its 90th year in business. www.wattnet.com.



A Cup of Coffee Leads to Solutions



Rockford Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey and area manufacturers talk about how they can be more competitive. Photo: Mike Graham

Mayor Morrissey requested the help of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council in facilitating a dialogue between him and the manufacturing community. The RAEDC takes care of arranging and managing the meetings that are held from 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. at a different plant each quarter. About 20 people attend each session.

“Today, you don’t even touch oil and grease in manufacturing,” said Tom Rudnicki, co-owner of Smith Industrial Rubber at one of Rockford Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey’s quarterly “Manufacturing Coffees” early one morning. Well, maybe just a little, but the point Rudnicki was making during a spirited discussion about the quality of our workforce was that manufacturing is not dying, it’s changing into a highly technical industry – one that requires a thorough knowledge of computers. And, manufacturers at this meeting thought that students should be exposed to manufacturing in grade school; high school is too late.

A Cup of Coffee Leads to Solutions (continued)

Top Needs

Three top needs of the manufacturing community emerged clearly from these meetings.

- **Better supply of skilled workers for the future**
- **Improved business environment, including reduced costs of doing business**
- **Updated infrastructure, particularly in transportation**

The input from these meetings is included in the City of Rockford’s planning processes, helping them prioritize needs. One example of a direct outcome of these meetings is that the city’s has begun to streamline significantly the permitting process.

Mayor Morrissey sees tremendous opportunities to rise above the challenges that face the manufacturing community. **“I want to hear from them, so we can identify problems and solutions,”** he said. **“For example, manufacturing businesses can be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the 1 percent sales tax referendum and I am pleased that they are stepping up to support it. Businesses need an improved infrastructure in order to remain competitive,”** he added.

Manufacturers Must Take Ownership

Bill Roop, chair of the RAEDC Business Retention & Expansion Solutions Team, encourages other manufacturers to get involved and attend the Mayor’s Manufacturing Coffees. **“For our community to be truly competitive, businesses need to take the lead in creating success. Local government has to understand our world, and they can support us, but we need to take ownership of these challenges,”** said Roop.

For information on the next Mayor’s Manufacturing Coffee, contact Mark Podemski, vice president for development at 815.987.8118, ext. 124 or mpodemski@rockfordil.com.



Bill Roop, chair of RAEDC Business Retention & Expansion Solutions Team says businesses must take the lead.



Happy 100th Anniversary, Joseph Behr & Sons

Few businesses make it to a 100th anniversary but Joseph Behr & Sons did, and celebrated it in style this past summer with an open house and picnic. The 350-employee recycling company with 8 facilities in 4 states has plenty of reasons to celebrate. They recently installed a new \$7 million car shredder at their Mason City, Iowa plant. The firm's business is strong and they plan to add 10 more employees in the near future.



Dick Behr, CEO of Joseph Behr & Sons, enjoying the 100th anniversary celebration of his company, with retiree Helen Allen.

Photo: Jodi Behr-Bigall



Part of Joseph Behr & Sons' 150-yard-long new shredder line that "shreds" cars into pieces smaller than a bar of soap.

Photo: Steve Pitkin

Also, there are plans to improve Kishwaukee Street, a state highway, which will give Behr improved access to their plant. As part of the project, the company donated land to the Rockford Park District to beautify the area and provide a much-needed gateway to south Rockford. The donated land will help upgrade Tenth Avenue Park and provide a new bicycle lane.

New Industrial Map Gets Rave Reviews

"Absolutely fantastic," is what a leading national commercial real-estate company said about the industrial development map created by the Rockford Area Economic Development Council. This is the first such map for the Rockford area.

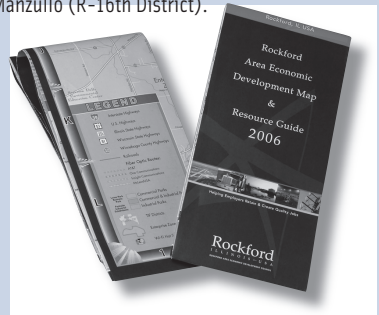
Mark Goode, principal partner of Venture One Real Estate, LLC that's headquartered in the Chicago suburb of Riverwoods, said it compares "excellently" to maps of other communities.

"Industrial users care about access to highways, where the industrial parks are, where the logistic centers are like your UPS hub at the airport and the Rochelle Union Pacific intermodal hub. It shows all that extremely well," he said.

Additional features include:

- regional demographics
- City of Rockford zoning map
- inset of downtown Rockford and its TIF districts
- WIFI hot spots and broadband infrastructure

To request a free map, please contact the RAEDC at 815.987.8118 or email information@rockfordil.com. The map was made possible by a grant from the Small Business Administration chaired by U.S. Congressman Don Manzullo (R-16th District).



For more information on RAEDC programs or services, please call 815.987.8118, e-mail info@rockfordil.com or visit www.rockfordil.com.

The primary role of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council is to market the Rockford, Illinois area. The goal is to help employers retain and create quality jobs. The RAEDC learns what employers need to grow, introduces them to potential resources and facilitates multi-agency coordination.

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ROCKFORD AREA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

