

PROGRESS 2007

Oskaloosa Area Chamber & Development Group: Promoting, improving and enhancing the Mahaska community

The Oskaloosa Area Chamber & Development Group is located at 124 N. Market St. Those persons (employees and volunteers) in the building there can be seen in action fulfilling their mission that states, "The OACDG promotes, improves, and enhances the business environment and quality of life in the Mahaska Community."

Let's see what goes on at 124 North Market.

Main Street Oskaloosa reports a total of 4,400 volunteer hours were utilized for the downtown district during 2006 for beautification; events like Art on the Square, Sweet Corn Serenade, Friday After Five and the Lighted Christmas Parade; construction; and administrative tasks.

Dedicated to preserving the Historic District, Main Street Oskaloosa efforts are centered on the streetscape project that will enhance our historic city square.

Oskaloosa Chamber activities included the 2006 Scholarship Golf Outing. Over 20 teams participated in the event raising \$2,600 for the scholarships. These funds along with \$5,000 contributed by area businesses will be awarded to Mahaska County Seniors in the spring.

The OACDG's newsletter, "The Communicator," is distributed to every home in Mahaska County, benefiting our members as well as our community. Membership is rising at the Oskaloosa Chamber and members are always rising up to help. The community has fostered a more open communication and partnership with each other, as well as city officials, to help build a stronger community. Business After Hours events had a successful 2006 thanks

to the Chamber Diplomats. The Diplomats also began a Membership Visit program.

Other membership benefits include the following:

- Business referrals
- Business listing in Chamber brochures and on Web site with Web links
- Business start-up and expansion assistance
- Retail and industrial space availability information
- Legislative forums
- Seminars and workshops
- Diplomat visits and ribbon cuttings
- Networking opportunities in event & committee participation
- Reduced prices on directories and publications
- Oskey Cash program (Over \$50,000 circulating among Chamber members in 2006)
- Bad check alert system
- Community and tourism information

Some goals of the OACDG for 2007 include:

- Completion of the Streetscape Project and the restoration of the Iowa Building exterior to its 1876 grandeur.
- Continuation of educational seminars and workshops, such as Lunch & Learn, for local businesses.
- Continue membership development and retention efforts.
- Promote "Make Oskaloosa Your First Choice" theme for the entire OACDG membership.
- Expand opportunities for involvement in community service projects.
- Increase downtown revitalization efforts.
- Promote Oskey Cash efforts to a goal of \$60,000.
- Continue to work with city and county governments for good communication and unified community betterment projects.

• Write two member spotlight stories in "The Communicator" to promote membership.

• To have Oskaloosa be recognized as a Cultural Entertainment district.

• Work with groups for entertainment before summer community band concerts.

• Continue Business After Hours.

• More chamber member participation in city council and county supervisor meetings.

• Encourage more chamber membership attendance at Eggs & Issues and other forums.

OACDG Director Jon Sullivan reports that Eggs & Issues this year has been a success. The legislative forum has been moved to Smokey Row on the downtown square, and attendance has been "outstanding."

Also, Sullivan said the 2007 Town & Country banquet held recently at Penn Central Mall had 410 people attend.

Sullivan reports that the Streetscape Project will begin on April 3 and the renovation of the Iowa Building will begin in the middle of May.

MCARD

Mahaska County Agricultural and Rural Development program has been a resource for the development of Mahaska County's rural communities and agricultural enterprises since 1998. The Chamber, Mahaska County, our rural towns (Barnes City, Beacon, Eddyville, Fremont, Keomah Village, Leighton, New Sharon, Rose Hill and University Park) and area businesses all contribute to MCARD's efforts. The return on their investment has been considerable. In the past seven years, MCARD has helped bring in over \$6.1 million in grants and loans to

facilitate rural and ag-related development projects across the County. MCARD focuses on helping Mahaska County's agricultural producers access new markets and technologies to add value to their products. MCARD also serves as a "one-stop-shop" for entrepreneurs seeking to expand or start up a local business. Through MCARD, they can access business planning, feasibility studies, grant writing, funding resource, leadership training, strategic planning and more. MCARD also works under the Mahaska County Board of Supervisors to administer the Mahaska County Revolving Loan Fund that currently has over \$200,000 available to help launch or expand qualified local businesses. MCARD is currently working with:

• A childcare project in Oskaloosa.

• Buying a building for the existing Preschool in New Sharon.

• A new value-added agriculture business on the outskirts of Oskaloosa.

• City of Eddyville in repairing their Civil War Statue.

• USDA in promoting Energy Efficiency Grants available to small business owners and local farmers.

• Rewriting the guidelines for our existing Revolving Loan Fund to make it more available to individuals who want to start up a business.

• City of Fremont in repairing their existing sidewalks, a new sewer system and a new fire truck.

• Two small business start-ups in the Oskaloosa area.

The SUCCESS Center: The SUCCESS Center, a Business/Education/Extension

partnership, continues its mission to connect students and teachers to the world of work. New in 2006-2007 is the Mahaska County 4-H Tech Team. Team members are currently working with the support of an ESRI/4-H GIS/GPS grant award — valued at \$100,000 for software, licensing, curriculum and training — to do community projects. Youth work with adult mentors to identify needs, resources and assets, and then create maps which can be used in the problem-solving and decision making process. Among the first year's projects: updating the Forest Cemetery map, mapping new conservation area development, and emergency and disaster planning.

Ongoing programs and support include:

- School Enrichment
- 4-H After School e-Mentoring
- Career Days
- Tech Prep Curriculum Support
- Technology Education Support
- Partnership Development
- Water Quality Project
- Construction Trades Program
- Job Shadowing
- Career Portfolios
- Classroom, Inc. Business Simulations
- Grant Writing

M A H A S K A C O M M U N I T Y DEVELOPMENT GROUP:

Mahaska Community Development Group, also located at 124 N. Market, is a group of employers committed to economic and community development efforts to ensure the continued health and prosperity of business and industry in the

Mahaska community.

Economic development is about working together to maintain a strong economy by creating and retaining desirable jobs, which provide a good standard of living for individuals. Increased personal income and wealth increases the tax base, so as a community, we can provide the level of services that residents expect. A balanced, healthy economy is essential for community well-being. All area businesses are impacted by the overall prosperity of the Mahaska economy. If your business depends on a local consumer base, our area work force, or simply the quality of life that makes this a great place to live, you have an interest in growing our local economy.

Where will MCDG focus its efforts? MCDG will put its energies into three main areas:

• Business Retention & Expansion: Studies have shown repeatedly that local job growth is generated primarily from a community's existing businesses. MCDG will work with local employers on their retention and expansion needs.

• Business Attraction: Attracting new businesses into the Mahaska community will help to diversify the local economy and protect it from economic downturns that are part of our cyclical economy.

• Government Relations: Economic development does not happen in a vacuum. To be successful, economic development must function as a part of the entire socio-economic environment. The business community needs an advocate to make sure the business perspective on issues is heard by decision makers.

Vermeer, Continued from Page 2

International and domestic Platinum level dealerships included Vermeer Colorado, Vermeer Midwest, Vermeer Southeast, Vermeer Mid Atlantic, Vermeer MidSouth, Vermeer Wisconsin, Vermeer North Atlantic, Vermeer Great Plains, Vermeer of Tennessee, Vermeer Sales and Service Northern Ohio, Vermeer Equipment of Texas, Vermeer Southern Ohio, and Vermeer Sales and Service Minnesota. While Industrial Dealership Awards were granted, top agricultural retail distributors were also honored in the Platinum Master Dealer Award Program.

A Year in Review

Vermeer Manufacturing Company management and employees are optimistic about a promising future and are thankful for past successes, as they take on the healthy challenges of a competitive

marketplace and global economy. Vermeer celebrated the past and the future at an employee year-end meeting which gathered its nearly 2,000 employees at the Vermeer Global Pavilion. Attendees enjoyed information, a variety of prizes, and grand prize drawings including trips to Vermeer locations in The Netherlands and China for dedicated participants of the Vermeer Expect the Best program. Vermeer Co-CEOs Bob Vermeer and Mary Andringa closed the meeting by thanking employees for all their hard work and dedication to the company, and generously giving each employee a \$500 check. In turn, employees had created a surprise thank you video for them for all they do for the people at Vermeer. Together, the Vermeer team looks forward with excitement to all that lies ahead in 2007.

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