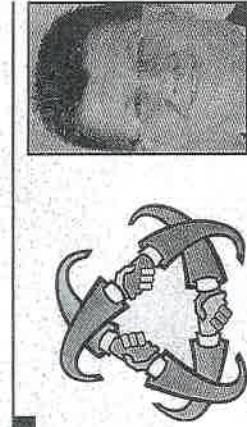


Denver area's experiences a good case study for northeast Indiana

Northeast Indiana is a great place to live and work. Quality communities are built on the basis of quality people and opportunities, so it should come as no surprise that northeast Indiana has a lot to offer. Anytime economic development efforts are based on the truly benevolent idea of helping our communities become even better, all of us have something we can contribute to the process. Collaboration becomes the logical "best practice" to provide the best opportunity to participate.

I was honored to have the opportunity recently to travel to Metro Denver with the Leadership Fort Wayne-Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership delegation. My involvement would not have been possible without the generosity of donors like AEP/Indiana Michigan Power, NIPSCO, Parkview Health, Do it Best, Fort Wayne Metals and others. Their collaborative spirit brought together 36 of us and gave us an opportunity as a group to learn more about ways we in turn can help each other regionally. The trip gave me a better understanding of why I enjoy living in northeast Indiana and a stronger commitment to efforts to make our communities even better places to live and work.

Even though Metro Denver is dramatically different from northeast Indiana, it was a very good case study for us. They obviously are more like a "megalopolis" than we are, even though the Metro Denver



MARK WICKERSHAM
Huntington County Economic Development

International Harvester on even larger scales: the savings-and-loan collapse and the oil shale exploration collapse during the 1980s. They really had no choice but to organize an aggressive, well-coordinated plan for growth and recovery. They are not afraid of accountability and transparency. They've had their fights in the process, but they have been working on a collaborative approach to economic development for nearly 25 years. They have demonstrated results but their experience was not for the weak in heart.

Northeast Indiana's economic development community believes in a collaborative approach as well. We believe economic development success is best described as a "team sport." Huntington County, like other counties in northeast Indiana, has experienced several very positive economic development "wins" over the last three years as well as serious challenges.

More than 1.4 million square feet of previously empty industrial buildings have now been redeveloped in our county. It took the efforts of a lot of people to make that happen, and it's clear that none of us will experience a total recovery until all the surrounding counties in our region share even more success. A collaborative approach makes that process so much easier.

The collaborative process I believe in assumes that the participants are trained, experienced professionals with a common

appreciation for each other, our various communities and especially the private sector itself. Collaboration demands transparency, accountability and trust. The Metro Denver group shares that view.

Collaboration is not a process through which a group accomplishes tasks that individuals should and would otherwise oppose. It is not an effort to avoid accountability nor disguise mistakes anymore that it is an opportunity for certain individuals to prosper at the expense of an unknown public. True collaboration is not the imposition on individuals of "collective decisions" but rather an honest recognition of what communities by definition should be about — that people of good will can frequently accomplish more when sharing information and resources than they might individually.

My last memory of Denver was no what had been planned. It was the sight of thousands of Occupy Wall Street demonstrators marching through Denver's downtown while security forces in full riot gear and weapons looked on. It reminded me of a bit of wisdom Morton Marcus shared with me one time when he said, "Mark there will always be opposition to economic development and change. The question is what will the supporters do?"

MARK WICKERSHAM is executive director of Huntington County Economic Development, www.hcued.com.

Mark Fort Wayne Business Weekly 10/22 - 11/3/11 p. 14