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Front—HCDA story w photo 11-12-09

Development Association has two decades of progress under its belt

By Kent Thompson

Anniversaries are typically a time to reminisce about the past and to take stock in the good things that have been achieved and the victories won.

While the Humboldt County Development Association (HCDA) will be doing that next week when it celebrates its 20th anniversary as an organization, it also will be looking forward.

More so than most groups, the HCDA is rooted in the future. One of the primary purposes of the organization is to envision what Humboldt County can become and to work with existing and new business and industry to make that happen.

Humboldt County has an impressive track record when it comes to accomplishments over the past 20 years, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the HCDA and its 14-member board of directors.

One of those directors who has been involved from the onset is Ron Sande, president of Sande Construction in Humboldt.

Even coming out of the farm crisis of the mid-1980s, business development was always on the minds of progressive industrialists in the community.

"Things were always cooking, always going on," Sande recalls.

"It was at that time (20 years ago) that we started having regular meetings and formed (as an association)," Sande said.

"It's been about helping existing industry as much or more than getting new, although there was some of that too. There was a lot of activity even back then," Sande said.

"We had plenty to talk about. More than we could get to in an hour," he remembers.

"Jerry Howard and Phil Kennedy were two local bankers and were the co-chairs of the association when things began. They spent a lot of time in meetings and working behind the scenes to get things done," Sande said.

Current HCDA President John Hartford's association with the

organization stretches back nearly as long as Sande's.

"I've been involved since I've been president of Bank Iowa in Humboldt. That was 14 years ago, and I've been president of the HCDA for the past 10 years," Hartford said.

Major accomplishments

Hartford listed what he considers some of the major accomplishments of the HCDA during the past two decades.

- The purchase of land for the Northwest Industrial Park in concert with Humboldt County REC and Corn Belt Power.

- The recruitment of Hog Slat Midwest Division to locate its plant in the park and its subsequent expansions.

- The purchase by Ag Parts of the first HCDA spec building and their expansion to make the building a double-decked structure.

- Humboldt Controls and Fabrication locating in the industrial park.

- Nokomis Machine locating in the industrial park.

- The building of the current 20,000 square foot spec building, and the associated roads and utility infrastructure in the Northwest Industrial Park.

Hartford said a number of developments with existing industry outside the park have improved the business climate, increased job opportunities and helped Humboldt County develop economically.

Some of those events have included:

- The purchase of the former Hotsy building by Jet Company and their subsequent expansion.

- The showroom addition and plant expansion at Dodgen Industries.

- Hy-Capacity's numerous expansions and retrofitting of the old Coke bottling plant into a modern manufacturing facility.

- Major updating and plant expansions by the Chantland Company at both its north and south locations.

- Demolition and clean-up of the former FRIT site in conjunction with the city of Humboldt and Humboldt County.

"It has been a very long process, but we are close to being able to develop the land as the new Humboldt Business Park," Hartford said proudly.

"It should be an attractive location for business and industry that have a commercial need. It is located along highway frontage with 30 acres total. It's not prime farmland, so it's a choice location for future expansion and development," Hartford said.

"The expansion at Liguria Foods is something that we are very excited about. It's another indication of growth in our industrial sector that drives the train of economic development," the HCDA president said.

Hartford was also quick to point out other capital projects and expansions at companies like Hadar Manufacturing, Hanisch Manufacturing, HLT Limited, Syntex and AP Air Inc., were milestones for those companies that the HCDA was pleased to have provided assistance.

Humboldt County development is not limited to the city of Humboldt and its environs. The HCDA recently served as a sponsoring entity for funds received allowing Pioneer Hybrid in Renwick to expand its warehouse.

The HCDA recently held one of its educational CEO Roundtable meetings at the plant and toured the facilities.

Director on board

It became clear a few years ago that the job of being president of the HCDA was becoming more than a part-time volunteer position.

In July of 2006, Lonnie Larson was hired as the first director of HCDA.

"Given the services available and in order to run a successful organization strategically, we needed a full-time director," Hartford said.

"The board's feeling was that it would allow us to be better able to impart information and have the readiness to respond to needs of our members and potential clients. It increased our presence in the community, allowed for better preparedness and better service," Hartford said.

Larson's duties and responsibilities are far reaching. Some of her jobs include business development activities, contact with individual businesses and industries through the organization's call program, marketing and public relations, prospect development and cultivation, grant writing, research and

development for economic and business assistance, professional services for HCDA members and serving as a liaison between the association and other business development groups and governmental and non-governmental agencies.

One of those groups, the Mid Iowa Growth Partnership (MIGP), is a consortium of economic development representatives from nine counties in North Central Iowa. Its membership includes Humboldt, Calhoun, Hamilton, Hardin, Kossuth, Palo Alto, Pocahontas, Webster and Wright counties.

Larson currently serves as president of the group.

While the myriad of financial assistance and developmental assistance programs Larson works with is too numerous to mention in this article, some recent exciting news is that the MIGP was approved last week for a Regional Innovation Grant in the amount of \$250,000. The funds will be used by MIGP to address workforce and population loss issues in the north central Iowa region. The region includes a population of 175,000 and a potential labor force of 300,000.

Also through MIGP, the local development association engaged the Smart Solutions Group to develop a regional marketing and target industry study. The company also facilitated strategic planning for HCDA.

One of the big success stories for the development group in terms of financial partnering has been the Intermediary Relending Program. Through an original loan from USDA Rural Development and partnering with the city of Humboldt through tax increment financing revenues, more than \$800,000 has been made available for plant renovations, factory additions, new buildings and equipment.

Importance of partners

HCDA has also been involved in partnering with Corn Belt Power Cooperative and Humboldt County Rural Electric Cooperative in proving funds and business incentives for development.

Speaking of partners, in an effort to stimulate interest and mutually beneficial relationships, the HCDA developed a partners program in 2009. For support levels

of \$250, \$500 and \$1,000, individuals and businesses receive levels of promotion and recognition on the HCDA Web site.

Larson said the program is growing and looks to expand with an increasing virtual presence of the HCDA in the future.

"We've had great partnerships with the city and county, Corn Belt and REC. A lot of the development that has gone on is because of our partnerships with other entities," Larson said.

"Working with the development association through the revolving loan fund has allowed us to be an active partner in business development," said Steve Long, speaking as general manager of Humboldt County REC.

Long also serves as vice president of the HCDA Board. Other officers are Doug Berte, treasurer and Lorie Bennett, secretary.

"When assigned service areas were designated in the 1970s, it limited the geographic growth we could experience as a cooperative. The development in the Northwest Industrial Park as well as industries like Hy-Capacity and Jet Co., has allowed us to expand our load generation and increase our sales of electricity, even though we are in a fixed service area," Long explained.

"It's good for our members (as a small cooperative), it's good for the local industry and the job base, it's good for everybody," Long said.

"You have to have industry to pay the taxes, and it takes young people (in the workforce) to run those industries. Our average age is growing older and I'm encouraged that young people can find opportunity in Humboldt and Humboldt County. Hopefully they can build and buy homes here and raise their families," Long said.

Long's observations feed into the fact that all development is interrelated.

Among the board members of the HCDA are Humboldt and Twin Rivers Superintendent of Schools Greg Darling, along with Humboldt County Memorial Hospital CEO Rob Colerick.

"The development association takes a keen interest in what's going on with our hospital, our schools and our city government," Hartford said.

Darling has sat on the board since he moved to town in the

summer of 2008. He said the monthly HCDA meetings are ones he really looks forward to.

"It's a great organization and a great opportunity for the community to have a group of volunteers who are so pro active in being involved in helping existing business and bringing in new industry," Darling said.

The superintendent said it is very helpful to him as an administrator for two school districts in the county to find out what's going on in the business and industrial sector.

"It's an excellent avenue for sharing communication. We have several members involved in HCDA who are members of our School Facility Study Committee," Darling said.

"I guess I can't think of any one thing as a development association that's far reaching above another. I'd say the biggest thing is that the association has always been there when local industry needed help, whether it was a loan or a piece of machinery, we tried to help," Sande said.

Larson said the organization offers a unique perspective on what makes Humboldt County a great place to live.

"It's a collection of citizens who are believers in our Humboldt County business and industry, and I'm here to be an advocate for them," the development director said.

The HCDA is a shining example of an organization of individuals working together for the greater good of the county as a whole.

(pull out info)

Who: Humboldt County Development Association

What: 20th anniversary celebration, featuring business displays, Humboldt County business and industry trivia, music, hors d'oeuvres and a short program

When: Thursday, Nov. 19, 4-7 p.m.

Where: Rustix Restaurant and Reception, 706 Sumner Avenue, public is invited to attend

Why: To recognize the accomplishments achieved and to look forward to the promise of the next 20 years