

MMDC helps find solutions

By BRYCE MARTIN
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Middle Michigan Development Corp. sees struggling businesses on a day-to-

day basis. Its goal is to work with companies to figure out a solution to their hardships.

As director of business development for MMDC, Katherine Methner assists companies with applying to their municipality for tax abatement, if they are adding new equipment or expanding in some way. This is helpful to the businesses in that if they can save on their taxes, then they can reinvest that money into the business.

Recently, MMDC assisted Woodsman Chippers of Farwell in going to the state to extend the time for its tax-free status in a Renaissance Zone. They expanded their company and needed help.

The company has already added additional personnel in its sales, marketing and technical departments.

MMDC can also help businesses upgrade their workers' skills by connecting the businesses with the right funding sources to get training for their people.

"Sometimes some companies need a little financial assistance and we have made available a revolving loan fund in the city of Mt. Pleasant and also Clare County, that they can go to those loan funds for capital," Methner said.

Typically, MMDC initiates meetings with companies. Most of the ones they talk to are manufacturing or technology based and are contacted once a year to review their progress.

There are 75 companies in Clare and Isabella counties that are typically called on each year, and in their meetings they tell MMDC if they need assistance in any way.

Access to capital and loans is one of the main problems facing businesses since the economic slump.

"There are companies that could expand or grow their market, but there just is a lack of capital out there, with the larger banks being more conservative. They just have a hard time getting that capital," Methner said.

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Entrepreneurs are also worked with, in an attempt to develop new small businesses within the counties.

"If someone comes to us and wants to start a business, typically we send them to the Small Business and Technology Development Center (in Mt. Pleasant) because they're the ones that can help a new company write a business plan and work with them on how to market their business and help them do research to find customers," Methner said.

"We fit into that realm by knowing the incentives that are available for business startups and just the resources that are available to new companies. We also have a list of buildings or properties that they may want to locate their business in."

MMDC's new president is Brian Anderson. Methner said he's in the process of getting to know the community and learning about the different organizations and people he will be talking to.

Despite being a non-profit corporation, MMDC is itself not immune to the economy.

"I think that the economy affects most businesses, and our company is stable, but like everybody else, we have to watch our pennies as well," Methner said.

MMDC was first developed as an economic development corporation for Clare and Isabella counties.

MMDC has been working with businesses in the region since 1982. Its other duties are to assist in writing grants for some organizations for infrastructure and it has been involved in the creation of the Community Foundation for Mt. Pleasant, the International Relations Council for the Mt. Pleasant area, and the leadership institutes in both Clare and Isabella counties.