

MMDC marks 25th year

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Twenty-five years in operation is a proud achievement for any business.

For business development organizations, however, 25 years is a near-miraculous feat.

Middle Michigan Development Corp., which represents Isabella and Clare counties as well as 13 other clients, reached that milestone in 2006.

But the celebrations are being kept low-key, said George Dunn, MMDC president. The only planned event will be a MMDC board mem-

ber dinner in early January.

"Most of our successes, or achievements, we don't take credit for," Dunn said. "Most people probably don't know what we do because we've never really pushed ourselves (into the limelight)."

Most people in the two counties may not know what MMDC does, but the effects quickly become obvious.

Incorporated in the fall of 1981, MMDC quickly took over development of a "high-tech" park at Central Michigan University's campus, which today is called the Center for Applied Research and Technology.

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MMDC

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CART is in the midst of an ambitious construction project that will double its size and attract even more and large biotechnology clients.

CART also is one of only 11 state-designated SmartZones.

Also on the agenda was development and management of the Industrial Development Corporation Park, now called the Industrial Park North, which now is filled to capacity.

MMDC has been an integral player in a lengthy list of projects in the intervening two and a half decades, Dunn said.

The development corporation now manages five industrial parks and the CART, as well as being a key player in the expansion of M-20 to a five-lane road between Midland and Mt. Pleasant, Dunn said. It also aids any industrial site or company that wishes to do business or move into the Isabella and Clare counties area.

"MMDC really is a model for economic development groups," Dunn said. "We are a unique organization in the way we are structured. I don't know of anyone who has done what we've done."

Originally a two-member organization (City of Mt. Pleasant and CMU), MMDC quickly turned to a client-based group including Isabella and Clare counties, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, Mid Michigan Community College, cities of Harrison and Clare, Union Township, village of Farwell, and the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce.

Although on the surface MMDC may appear to be about creating jobs, that just wasn't the case initially, Dunn said.

And there was good reason for that.

"Isabella County has traditionally had one of the three lowest unemployment rates in the state," Dunn said. He also said that Clare County's jobless rates would be much improved if the "generationally unemployed" (i.e. Those with no



(Sun photograph by LISA YANICK)

Middle Michigan Development Corp. President George Dunn sits at his desk in Mt. Pleasant.

desire to ever work) statistics were weeded out. "The Central Michigan Metropolitan region has been blessed with low unemployment. The original focus 25 years ago was never to create jobs."

The three prime movers in creating the MMDC - Mt. Pleasant, CMU and the Mt. Pleasant Industrial Corporation - had three separate motives, but combined into one effective organization.

The city was looking to diversify its tax base because even at that time there were large chunks of the land-locked city that belonged to tax-exempt organizations such as CMU, Mt. Pleasant Public Schools and Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

The IDC's interest was to hire a full-time professional to run the business interests, Dunn said.

CMU simply wanted to take the 300 acres on the south side of Mt. Pleasant and turn it into a "high tech" park with a balance of corporate enterprise and academic research and equipment

A look back

A brief list of projects and events in which MMDC has played a critical role:

- Mt. Pleasant Industrial Parks North and South
- Farwell Enterprise Park
- Center for Applied Research and Technology at CMU
- Clare Industrial Park (management only, not creation)
- M-20 Alliance, which was instrumental in widening M-20 to five lanes between Midland and Mt. Pleasant
- Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation
- G. R. "Rollie" Denison Leadership Institute
- Clare County Leadership Institute
- Central Michigan Research Alliance
- Mt. Pleasant International Relations Committee
- Written and received state and federal grants worth \$11.7 million

sharing, Dunn said.

"It's all grown towards this concept of regionalization," Dunn said, while citing example after example of the MMDC's work through the years. "We've had a lot of recruitment, retention and even more expansion."

For the next 25 years, Dunn sees a need for vision on a regional scale, he said. "There is a huge void in vision, not a new vision, but vision period. It isn't any one person's or entity's fault. We need to be able to think and be and dream about what it is we ought to be. We need to look at what we want to be in 20 to 25 years."

Part of that vision should include an interchange at U.S. 127 at Broomfield Road, which could be done with four acres and roughly \$7 million, Dunn said.

An enhanced and increased airport also would be critical to the future, he said.