



Group helps build business

CASS COUNTY

By [MONICA LUNDQUIST](#)

Cass County Correspondent

WALKER - Cass County Economic Development President Cy Struss and Executive Director Gail Leverson outlined progress the non-profit corporation has made in the last year during the Nov. 2 annual meeting.

CCEDC has helped 11 businesses complete business plan and financing packages to expand or open new businesses this year in Cass County. Those businesses will employ 126.5 people and are projected to make a \$32,114,447 capital investment here.

Revolving business loan funds have been established in Longville (\$25,000), Walker (\$125,000) and Backus (\$204,000). As businesses currently using those loans repay their city, each city can make loans to new businesses in the future.

Leverson spent 335 hours during the last year directly counseling 40 businesses to help them develop a business plan and obtain financing from multiple sources for their business ventures.

CCEDC has increased membership from 53 individuals, businesses and government agencies in 2005 to 76 this year and has a pledged membership of 93 for 2007. New members are welcome.

In 2006, memberships paid for \$33,150 of the overall \$103,650 budget. In 2007, members will pay more than \$40,000 of the \$119,500 budget.

The balance comes from Cass County's annual \$35,000 commitment and state and federal grants or matching funds.

Three new Cass County business owners described the help Leverson gave them to develop business plans and coordinate financing for their businesses.

¥ Dawn Anderson expects to open her new restaurant, Lucky Moose Bar and Grill, on Highway 371, just south of Walker, by mid-December.

She describes herself as a daughter and granddaughter of restaurant owners who has worked all her life in restaurants but who knew little about business ownership.

"Cass County Economic Development Corporation enables people to realize their dreams," she said. "I learned a lot from Gail Leverson."

Anderson said many people have contacted her this summer during the construction stage of her business, not only to eventually work in her restaurant, but also to work on the construction crews.

¥ Craig Anderson, who opened Trussworthy Components in Pine River industrial park in April, said he could not have started his business without help from CCEDC.

He said he approached Leverson in the spring of 2004 with his idea. She helped him with a business plan and helped him obtain five loans to enable him to build and equip the plant.

Craig Anderson said he has had \$650,000 in sales so far and has a goal of reaching \$3 million in annual sales for his prefabricated truss rafters. He sells to 17 lumberyards, mostly in Minnesota, but has shipped about 350 miles into North Dakota and Wisconsin.

The firm currently employs 20 workers whose wages range from \$8.50 per hour to \$14.50 per hour, depending on the skill required for their work.

¥ Denny Wickham opened Bear Pause Theatre in Hackensack about a year ago. He said he came to Leverson with a feasibility study and no money.

"She gives you information. You have to make the decisions," he said, adding that without her help, it would have been much more difficult to coordinate his loan package.

Wickham searches for ways to add value to his business, which also can benefit the community. Groups can host meetings at the theater. A church congregation meets there Sunday mornings.

This week, he gave the screen in the theater lobby to Walker-Hackensack-Akeley High School's business class. Students will learn about businesses through operating the screen and will receive the money it produces to run the school's business education program.

On Dec. 8 and 9, 250 contestants will come to Hackensack to compete in video games on the theater's big screen. Food and lodging businesses will benefit from the influx of contestants for that event, Wickham said. If they do a good job of hosting, a finals for a national video game event also may be at Bear Pause in May or June, he said.

"Whatever your dreams are, be willing to share. Let (Cass County) Economic Development help you," Wickham said. "There isn't any (other) place you can go that you can get that kind of help free."

CCEDC's office currently is located in the Community Resource Center in downtown Pine River (phone (218) 587-8287), but will move to the new Cass County Land Department building at Backus when that is completed late this year.

Information about CCEDC is available on the Cass County web site at www.co.cass.mn.us. Levenson's e-mail address is gail.levenson@co.cass.mn.us.

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