



## Cass County EDC aids area businesses

Hackensack Clinic, Walker Chase on the Lake among them

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Cass County Economic Development Corporation helped complete 13 new businesses in the county, during a recent fiscal year - including several in the Pine River area.

Gail Levenson, executive director of the EDC, highlighted recent business success stories at the annual meeting held Nov. 5 at Northern Lights Casino.

Area businesses assisted by the EDC include the new Hackensack Family Clinic; Chris O'Dell's (Complete Chimney Care) purchase and rehabilitation of the old Pine River Library building - now the Pine River Pantry coffee shop; and Proski's All Care, northeast of Pine River.

Other new businesses in Pillager, Walker and Cass Lake were assisted with startup, expansion or relocation projects.

Promoting new and expanded businesses is a goal of EDC. The organization works with the county, local businesses and the community to create new jobs and support business.

And, they have a strategy to do it.

The EDC's new five-year plan includes helping businesses create 100 or more jobs; assist in building \$10 million in new capital business development; and improve the unemployment rates by one-half of a percent - compared to neighboring counties.

The EDC also started a loan fund in fiscal year 2008-09 with the help of a Cass County grant, plus its own investment, to assist new businesses.

The Hackensack Family Clinic opened by St. Joseph's Medical Center was one of the projects aided by the EDC.

Jani Wiebolt, President and CEO of St. Joe's, spoke at the Nov. 5 dinner.

She said that Levenson "helped provide the support that we needed to get this project off the ground."

Wiebolt said that they declined a request to locate in Hackensack in 2002

because the town was smaller than they were used to locating in and were worried about a clinic's sustainability.

Later, in 2005, Wiebolt met Jim Johnson, the owner of the now constructed Hackensack Senior Class.

With the financial support of a community group Pines Area Medical Development Association's (PAMDA) and a space ready to lease, St. Joe's agreed to open a clinic.

PAMDA has agreed to pay SJMC's first year of operating expenses for the clinic as well committing to pay for clinic's lease for 10 years. The goal amount to raise is \$500,000.

"Our commitment is that we will serve the community long term," Wiebolt said.

The Chase Hotel in Walker was another project assisted by the EDC.

Steven Olson of Chase on the Lake Resort and Spa said that he became involved in the project 4.5 years ago.

The Chase Hotel was built in 1921.

A \$32 million project later, the hotel has been remodeled and additions made including an indoor swimming pool, coffee/pastry/gelato bar; the Copper Door Spa; Bowling Alley; and the 502 Bar & Lounge.

"Our goal was to make it a four-star property," Olson said.

"Gail has always been available," Olson said of Levenson and the EDC's assistance with the project.

She helped him secure a grant to build a community parking lot on site for anyone - including hotel guests - to use.

Businesses helped in the last year reflect an ongoing effort for the EDC.

In the last five years, the EDC has assisted with the completion of 46 business projects. And, 41 of the 46 are still in business, employing 447 people.

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