



## EDC helps start, expand numerous businesses

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WALKER - Cass County Economic Development Corporation highlighted at the annual meeting and dinner Friday two of the dozen businesses the nonprofit helped expand or start business in the last year.

Greg and Gina Smith invested \$250,000 to start Leech Lake Brewing Company, a microbrewery, in Walker. They started production Aug. 13 after 10 years of planning.

Paula and Dean Rocheleau, in partnership with Jerry and Ginny Kapsner, have opened Riverside Assisted Living Inc. at Pillager. They spent \$2.2 million to open 20 assisted living apartment units at Pillager. They started planning in 2005.

Gail Levenson, Cass County Economic Development director, helped both businesses write their business plans and to secure financing. She helped Paula Rocheleau through tax-increment financing process with the city of Pillager.

Greg Smith began brewing as a hobby at home 18 years ago. When IBM laid him off work, he decided to turn his hobby into a new profession, partially using his severance pay and partly with new financing.

He added onto an existing building in the newer section of Walker Industrial Park, got a long list of brewing business licenses and set up operations to brew six varieties of beer.

Production was an all-nighter marathon process at first, but he had refined production to improve processing times. He opened for business Sept. 10 and has been self-distributing in a 75-mile radius so far.

Smith expected to sell 25 growlers the first month, but sold 288 in the first two week, plus refills.

Rocheleau operates about a half dozen senior care residences, including some with memory care units.

The Pillager apartments are designed to enable self-sufficient people to continue to live in their apartment with staff and home care services to assist them as they may need more help. Rocheleau's goal is to enable people to die in their own home (apartment), she said.

Each separate apartment has a kitchenette, though three meals a day are provided to residents. There are one and two bedroom units among the available options.

Other businesses Levenson assisted in start-up or expansion are Birdie's Nest childcare facility, Caffiend coffee shop, CavComInc. (added new products), Cedarwood Floral design, Cedar Creek Market, Cool Beans Coffee Shop/Mother Earth's Bounty coffee shop and health food store, Master Care Automotive repair and services, Lake Front Electric contracting, Sawyer Timber (expanded into wood chipping) and White Pine Sales, Service and Rental (expanded into small engines).

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