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EDC projects outlined; Pine River business explains expansion

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The Cass County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) has helped with 60 projects, which are still in business since it became an independent nonprofit organization 10 years ago, said EDC Executive Director Gail Leverson.

Those businesses pay an average wage of \$12.71 per hour and have led to preserving and adding 697 jobs in the county, she said. More than \$51 million was invested to broaden the tax base in cities and townships here, she added.

EDC finished assisting the following businesses in the last year: Bayside Cabins, Backwoods Furniture, De Vita Dialysis Center, Lee's Welding and Repair, Northern Sales and Manufacturing and Pine River Bakery.

During the EDC annual dinner meeting Thursday, Oct. 30, in Walker, the EDC presented the Member of the Year award to Nancy Norr of Minnesota Power (Allele).

Northern Sales and Manufacturing owner Jeff Drexler described the history of his business and outlined its current expansion progress in Pine River.

He said the firm began as American Surplus, making storage sheds in 1993. At a customer's suggestion, the firm began building fish houses in 1997, making 150 that year. By 1998, it made 300 and by 1999 was up to 750 fish houses. This year, the business is on track to make 2,530, Drexler said.

The business began operations in Montevideo, where it currently has 800 fish houses on order. The fish houses have evolved into year-round camping trailers with fishing hole fitting.

They can include air conditioning and showers, Drexler said, adding the firm now has 56 percent of the Minnesota recreational vehicle market, with plans to expand from Midwest states into Canada.

In addition to camping/fish house trailers, the firm has made mobile clinic structures and offices for North Dakota oil field workers.

Their second manufacturing plant that opened this year in Pine River employs 18 people, Drexler said.

EDC in 2014 obtained a \$410,000 grant for Longville and Backus to rehabilitate commercial and residential buildings in those cities and began a joint effort with Central Lakes College to offer health care classes in Pine River.

The Pine River college class program will continue into 2015, with nursing assistant and home health aide classes to be offered this winter and spring. There are some scholarships available. For more information or to register, call Rose Tretter 218-855-8036.