



## Quarter 3, 2023 - Newsletter

### Letter from the President

**“The biggest risk is not taking any risk.” – Mark Zuckerberg.**

The Forge Grand Opening marked a pinnacle moment in the strategic direction for IEDC. It captured the moment when collaboration meets determination, when challenge meets opportunity, when a team, with the support of partners and community, delivers.

The last quarter reflected that in all of our endeavors. Rob Sjostrand managed the project and worked hand-in-hand with construction partners, Hawk and ARI and managed through the ups and downs of a project unlike any other completed by IEDC. It required leadership, creativity, and determination to overcome challenges. The Forge, a compilation of IEDC’s Team and engaged partners, will bring new workforce development, entrepreneurship, and small business opportunities to our community.

I am incredibly proud of The Forge, but often our focus is on the shiny object, and doesn’t showcase the whole picture. Our entire team helped to build The Forge, because while Rob had a significant focus on The Forge, Nichole Arbour stepped up to carry a heavier load with our small business clients. IEDC carried on as we continued to lead in welcoming communities, supported housing efforts, drove attraction and site development, and led the Future Forest Stewards event.

The Forge allowed us to show, WE CAN. We can drive a multi-year, multi-funding sourced, major project and continue to deliver our critical services in small business support and community engagement. It was an incredibly busy time, but one where we learned about working as a team through adversity, and that WE CAN.

What does that mean? It means you can continue to expect more from the IEDC Team. We are up to the task, and we are ready to take on challenges that face our community. WE CAN support our small businesses, WE CAN lead in welcoming communities, WE CAN engage, learn, and drive economic and community development. Join us!



## SBDC Updates

SBDC – Business Consulting:

The third quarter has been exciting for the business consulting team at IEDC. Twenty initial new clients registered this quarter, which tipped us to the highest level on record for the year at 97 total. This alone means we have met with more new clients in the first 3 quarters than any previous year on record!

Meeting more businesses and reaching more clients has given the team a better understanding of the market and new business starts this year. We have been focused heavily on the cost of capital as the market continues to be difficult. Through the difficulty, we are excited to share that 6 new business starts were documented in the third quarter, for a total of 16 year-to-date. Assisting new business owners in starting their adventure is still the most gratifying piece of business consulting. Future expansions, employee hirings and growth are all areas we will be working on with these clients.

As we start the final quarter of 2023, we expect to see more clients exploring their own business ideas, based on previous years. Additionally, the business consulting team will be offering additional training, events, and opportunities for business owners. Please watch for more scheduled events as they are being developed!



## The Forge Updates

As third quarter wrapped up, big strides were made at The Forge, and all the pieces are coming together for opening to tenants and entrepreneurs in fourth quarter. The application process is set to be completed by November, and tentative move-in dates will be developed with each tenant.

Exterior work has been mostly completed, and the building has received a facelift and some much needed maintenance. Additional parking, signage and accessibility have been added, which will allow us to work with all potential tenants and improve safe access to the building.

Additionally, we have been extremely fortunate with the support of the community. Many groups have taken the opportunity to tour, hold training courses and learn more about The Forge and the project. These events have given us the opportunity to develop better operating procedures, and truly be ready for tenants in the coming months.



## 8-10-2023: Senator Klobuchar Visit to The Forge

The Forge welcomed a special visit from Senator Klobuchar in August and gave us the opportunity to showcase our unique facility. She was impressed by the diversity of offerings, from workforce development to education and entrepreneurship.

Senator Klobuchar has been incredibly supportive of our efforts at The Forge, providing letters of support for both of our federal grants, as well as supporting our current Congressional Direct Spending requests. It is extremely important to work closely with our legislators, as they are our voice at a national level. We are so grateful for her support for our local efforts and helping us to move this project forward.

We welcome all of our legislative leaders at The Forge and have been fortunate to be able to share our story in person and showcase the project. We know that this is largely due to the collaborative effort from all of our partners, such as MN North Colleges, Next Career Pathways, Northeast Office of Job Training and local entrepreneurs.



## 8-15-2023: The Forge Grand Opening

**"I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been," Wayne Gretzky.**

This quote is hanging proudly in the hallway of the south side of The Forge. It makes sense not only with our hockey heritage in the NE region, but with all the valuable things that IEDC and our partners knew would be needed at The Forge.



On August 15th, 2023, our team hosted The Forge Grand Opening. Our agenda was packed full of tours, speakers, lunch, and radio/television interviews! Presentations included: Congressman Pete Stauber; Representative Spencer Igo; MN DEED Executive Director of Business Development, Neela Mollgaard; IEDC Board Chair & CEO of North Itasca Electric Coop, Brad Dolinski; and IEDC Board Member & Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs of MN North Colleges, Bart Johnson.

The tours were very well received. Attendees were able to ask our team thought provoking questions and learn more about how they can use the space at The Forge! In an interview with Northern News, IEDC President, Tamara Lowney says, "We want to have opportunities in our community to stay in our community to learn and grow and thrive right here. If they have to leave, that's okay. We want to give them an opportunity to come back."

Learn more about The Forge at: <https://theforgeitasca.com/>

## 9-5-2023: National SBDC Day Conference

At the annual America's SBDC Conference, Nichole Arbour, IEDC Small Business Consultant, along with other Northland SBDC consultants, joined SBDC colleagues nationwide to engage in professional development, with the shared goal of empowering and expanding the thousands of small businesses they assist each year.

The conference revolved around networking with SBDC centers, attending classes to enhance their service capabilities for small business clients, and forging relationships with resource partners to strengthen the small business ecosystem. The conference also provided valuable best practices and tools applicable to Minnesota clients, spanning various areas like AI, social media and marketing, cybersecurity, and financial business management, all with the ultimate aim of continuous learning, growth, and improvement.



## 9-15-2023: Future Forest Stewards

The Future Forest Stewards sessions have proved to be an amazing opportunity for students to learn about the forestry industry. During these sessions, students interact with industry professionals who provide them with valuable lessons about the industry. The students are also given the chance to inquire about future career opportunities. This engagement with professionals helps the students develop a deeper understanding of the industry and their potential roles in it.



The addition of two simulators this year was an excellent way to give students a hands-on experience with the machines involved in the forestry industry. Being able to sit in the machines and see them in action at an active harvest site helped students understand the machinery's functions better. The expo provided an excellent opportunity for students to learn about sustainable forest management and the importance of Minnesota's forestry industry.

Overall, the Future Forest Stewards sessions and the North Star Expo have been a great way for students to learn about the forestry industry and its importance. These events provide the students with valuable insights and help them understand the industry's potential opportunities. The organizers are delighted with the success of this event and are committed to continuing to provide engaging events in the future.

## 9-19-2023: Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Housing Summit

IEDC joined regional partners at the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Housing Summit on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

It was a great day identifying opportunities for collaboration on the challenges in housing across the region. We were excited to be able to join in this effort as we can learn so much from our partners, both in

their successful projects, as well as those that may have come up short.

The event, which highlighted the challenges faced by everyone, was well attended by partners from multiple counties, both in housing and economic development. The attendees worked together in a facilitated session to help identify ways to support one another, sometimes by sharing stories and resources, and other times by providing letters of support.

This is the second of a series of gatherings where attendees gain insights and develop partnerships, as we move the dial in the direction of rural housing on both a state and federal level.



## 9-20-2023: Knowledge Exchange Program

The KEP Conference is an annual event in Minnesota, also known as the "Knowledge Exchange Program." It serves as a gathering for statewide SBDC consultants, bringing together staff and colleagues from across the state. Over the course of two days, Nichole and Rob, along with other Northland SBDC



consultants, shared best practices, engaged in professional development, and exchanged a wealth of information focused on nurturing and supporting entrepreneurs in Minnesota.

## 9-25-2023: Basic Economic Development Course

During the last week of September, Operations & Outreach Manager, Kayla Swanson attended the Basic Economic Development Course in Maple Grove, MN.

The course is a four-day program designed by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). It helps professionals in economic development gain knowledge and build their networks with other individuals also looking to make a career of economic development.

The course covered topics in Development, Business Recruitment and Expansion (BRE), Marketing & Business Attraction, Workforce, Housing, and more! There were 50 total attendees who spent the four days learning together and growing together. Kayla says that she can't wait to use all that she learned and put her knowledge to use at Itasca Economic Development Corporation in future projects.



## 9-27-2023: AGA

Arrowhead Growth Alliance (AGA) is a regional group of economic development leaders that meet quarterly to discuss opportunities to work collaboratively. This group has taken on projects such as

workforce development, leading to the development of NORTHFORCE, as well as most recently supporting the Community Economic Development Study (CEDS) completed by Arrowhead Regional Development Authority (ARDC).



The fall meeting was focused on growing our knowledge of indigenous history in Minnesota. Aarik Robertson, Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures, gave an engaging presentation on treaties. Rob Aitken, Leech Lake Financial Services, shared how they work with small businesses and members of the community. In addition, George Goggeye, a Leech Lake Band Member, shared his experiences growing up, reflecting on his traditions and heritage. Finally, the meeting concluded with a visit from “Middle of the Rez Road” podcasters, Joel Boshey and Charles Smith, telling their stories.

Our sessions were small and engaging, allowing us to ask questions and learn more from the speakers. It was a small step toward gaining more insight into our tribal communities, and one we hope to continue in future meetings.

The AGA meeting always wraps up with updates and insights from our fellow members, helping us to better understand opportunities to collaborate. The AGA Meetings foster dialog around critical challenges facing our region and how we can work together to address them.

## Thrive Up North Updates

"It's just a good time to be here," - Kyle and Amanda Lussier.

They're not wrong. Itasca County is booming right now. With new business, thriving school districts, and expanding of existing industry - why wouldn't you want to move here? Kyle & Amanda Lussier did a fantastic job in their video, describing what their life has been like since their move to Itasca County. The Thrive Up North initiative has the goal of doing just that: marketing our area as one that others will want to move to.



In 2023, the Thrive Up North campaign had the goal of giving out ten incentives packages. As of Q3, eight packages have been given out to various people of different industries including healthcare, manufacturing, energy, and more! We have showcased the Lussier's story. Kyle and Amanda are aspiring restaurateurs looking to take their business ideas from back-of-the-napkin to reality, right here in Itasca County. We will soon release Amber Fostervold's story. Amber is the General Manager at NoPo. She has been in the restaurant industry her entire life and decided it was the perfect move for her and her family when she saw the job posting for NoPo. Amber was also an incentives package winner. We're happy to be partnering with Weisguy Images for all of our stories. Be on the lookout for those at our website: [www.thriveupnorth.com](http://www.thriveupnorth.com).

## APEX Updates

### Northern Minnesota's Economic Renaissance: Harnessing Local Resources and Innovation

In the heart of Northern Minnesota, a remarkable economic transformation is unfolding. This region, known for its natural beauty, is on the cusp of a resurgence fueled by its rich natural resources and emerging technologies. In this article, we will explore the promising economic opportunities being investigated by APEX and IEDC for Itasca County and Northern Minnesota.



### **Biochar: The "Black Gold" Discovery**

Biochar, a carbon-rich charcoal created through the pyrolysis of organic materials, is proving to be a valuable resource for Northern Minnesota. With its vast forests, the region has abundant raw materials for biochar production. This "black gold" enhances soil fertility, sequesters carbon and holds promise as an alternative to fossil fuels for the local business sector. Collaborations between entrepreneurs and researchers are exploring diverse economic opportunities related to biochar, from energy generation to agriculture and carbon offset initiatives.

### **Wood Residuals: Powering Renewable Energy**

Northern Minnesota's lush forests generate substantial wood residuals, including sawdust and wood chips, which can be converted into renewable energy sources. Biomass power plants are emerging, utilizing these wood residuals to generate electricity, reduce waste, promote energy sustainability, and stimulate job growth. Developing wood pellet production for domestic and international markets presents another avenue for economic expansion.

### **Green Steel: A Sustainable Shift**

Northern Minnesota's abundant iron ore deposits have long fueled the American steel industry. However, green steel production has taken the spotlight in an era focused on sustainability. The region's access to multiple grade levels of iron ore, combined with advanced techniques like hydrogen-based reduction, is driving an eco-friendly steel production revolution. This reduces carbon emissions and positions Northern Minnesota as a global leader in green steel, attracting eco-conscious industries and investors.

### **Thriving on Technology**

Innovation is at the heart of unlocking Northern Minnesota's natural resource economic potential. Advanced automation and data-driven solutions optimize resource extraction and processing. The introduction of modern equipment is revolutionizing the mining industry, enhancing efficiency while minimizing environmental impact. Digital monitoring systems improve forest management, contributing to responsible forestry and sustainability.

### **Collaboration and Community Building**

The success of Northern Minnesota's economic growth relies on collaboration among local communities, businesses, and government agencies. Public-private partnerships are pivotal in infrastructure development, research initiatives, and skills training programs. These initiatives ensure that local residents are well-prepared to participate in emerging industries. Community engagement and investment in workforce development are integral components of the region's economic revitalization.

### **Conclusion**

Northern Minnesota and Itasca County's possible future economic resurgence underscores the remarkable potential of local resources and innovative solutions working in tandem. Green steel, biochar, wood residuals, and pioneering technologies offer economic growth while aligning with global sustainability efforts. By leveraging abundant resources and embracing modern technologies, Northern Minnesota is on track to secure its economic future and become a beacon of

green progress for the nation and the world. The region's economic transformation exemplifies the power of local resources and innovative thinking coming together in harmony.

## Entrepreneur Fund Updates

### **In 2023, EFund has:**

- Worked with 66 entrepreneurs in Itasca County, benefiting local businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs.
- Disbursed 16 loans, totaling \$1,543,402

Our partners at EF are excited to announce their upcoming awards ceremony. Continue reading to see their most recent press release below.



## Rapids Brewing to Receive Entrepreneur Fund's Distinction Award

Celebrating Business Excellence in Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin

**DULUTH, MN** – The **Entrepreneur Fund**, a catalyst for regional business growth, is set to honor outstanding businesses and celebrate economic success in the northern Minnesota and Wisconsin region at the first-ever **Entrepreneur Fund Distinction Awards**.

**One of the 2023 Distinction Honorees is Rapids Brewing located in Grand Rapids, Minnesota.** The owner, Bill Martinetto, is being honored for his ability to harness local talent for community vibrancy and comprehensive business expansion.

*“Bill’s commitment to nurturing local talent has not only boosted community vibrancy but has also been a driving force behind the comprehensive expansion of Rapids Brewing”,* said Shawn Wellnitz, Entrepreneur Fund CEO and President. *“Bill Martinetto’s dedication to both his business and the local community sets a shining example of what entrepreneurship can achieve when deeply rooted in the community it serves.”*

### **Distinction Award Details:**

Date: Wednesday, October 25, 2023

Time: 4-8 p.m.

Location: Duluth Entertainment Convention Center - Paulucci Hall

The Entrepreneur Fund's Distinction Awards will spotlight businesses that exemplify entrepreneurial excellence and play a pivotal role in driving regional economic growth. This unique event will provide an opportunity to witness the diverse tapestry of businesses that have made northern Minnesota and Wisconsin a thriving and prosperous region within **Entrepreneur Fund's 29-county service area**.

### **What to Expect:**

The evening promises an exclusive glimpse behind the scenes of these exceptional businesses, featuring candid “behind-the-business” discussions with the Distinction Honorees. Attendees will uncover their innovative strategies, and the path to scaling a small business effectively.

Networking opportunities will follow, showcasing a curated selection of regional food and beverages, fostering peer-to-peer connections among local business leaders.

The grand finale will be the recognition of the awardees for their significant contributions to the regional economy and a toast to a brighter and more prosperous future.

*“Small business owners make our communities vibrant and our regional economy resilient. The Distinction Awards recognize those businesses that stand out for business excellence and for their contributions to our region,”* said Shawn Wellnitz, Entrepreneur Fund CEO and President. *“At the Entrepreneur Fund, we believe it’s important to celebrate and amplify the positive impact these businesses have in our regional economy.”*



### **2023 Honorees and Their Distinctions:**

- **24 Hour Bookkeeper, Karine Woodman** - Transformation from a local business into a national accounting firm specializing in the construction industry.
- **A+ Garden & Landscaping, Tabatha Beier** - Workforce innovation and job quality for business growth.
- **Arctic Compressor, Steve Potter** - Growth and scale of a family-owned business.
- **Baby's on Broadway, Adelle Starin** - Expansion into a national market as a retailer for Durable Medical Equipment, successful store expansions and establishing a national network for mothers.
- **Duluth Grill, Tom Hanson** - Development of a positive, engaging employee culture; internal leadership growth and management sustainability.
- **Lamppa Manufacturing, Garrett Lamppa** - Growth of a family-owned manufacturing firm with a commitment to workforce and quality jobs on the Iron Range.
- **Rapids Brewing, Bill Martinetto** - Harnessing local talent for community vibrancy and comprehensive business expansion.
- **SCS Interiors, Mike Hudyma** - Growth and scale of a small upholstery shop to a world-class manufacturer.
- **Syvantis Technologies, Janelle Riley** - Transformation of a local service business into a nationally managed technology solutions provider with a growth strategy that prioritizes developing people and capacity before increasing sales.
- **Tongue and Groove Store, Ann and Kyle Anderson** - Successful scale from a start-up to a robust manufacturing company that now serves a national market.

The Entrepreneur Fund's Distinction Awards is open to the public and welcomes local business owners, aspiring entrepreneurs, community leaders and economic development partners who contribute to the success of businesses in our region. Tickets are on sale now at [efund.org/awards](https://efund.org/awards)

## **CEDA Updates**

The summer of playground builds is coming to an end. If you aren't already aware, Itasca County and nearby communities have seven new playgrounds to explore and discover. Through contracts with Itasca County, Coleraine, Hill City and

Northome, CEDA supported several area communities in bringing their identified playground projects to fruition by helping identify and secure funding, collaborate with project partners, market community build dates and recruit volunteers, just to name a few. Going into 2023, CEDA knew this many playground builds was going to be a heavy lift—all of which were possible only due to the amazing community members, volunteers, project partners, city council(s) support, and staff working tirelessly to make them happen.

Societal changes during Covid prompted these communities to make playground upgrades a community focus. As communities were isolated and spending more time outside, residents and community members realized that many of the playgrounds were outdated or, in some cases, found to be unsafe. Due to the higher demands of use and feedback from community members, it became clear that these playgrounds were in need of a facelift, replacement or in some cases, adding new outdoor amenities to their community. With CEDA's assistance, volunteers, city/township officials and staff diligently pursued all funding options to offset the costs through means other than the entity's budget to keep the expense low to the taxpayers. An impressive 94% of the total \$996,791 cost for all seven playgrounds was grant funded, of which, the five playgrounds in Itasca County totaling \$705,056 were 99% grant funded, and the two outlying communities, totaling \$291,735 were 83% grant funded!

Playgrounds aren't just playgrounds...they create a positive trickledown effect on the immediate community and surrounding area. Whether a person is a current resident or someone looking to plant new roots, families often look for communities that are family-friendly, which include safe amenities for children that are within walking distance, and take advantage of the beautiful outdoors in our area. In



addition, visitors often look for attractions where children can explore and burn off energy while the adults support small shops and restaurants. For all of these reasons and more, a playground is an amenity that supports the community by attracting new visitors and creates an economic boost.

Several playgrounds across Itasca County have seen visitors from outlying communities and as far as Silver Bay! We encourage you to discover these new playgrounds in Bovey, Deer River, Effie, Goodland, Marcell, Hill City, and Northome. It's not too late to make a trip out to explore these new amenities! In addition, new playgrounds on the docket for 2024 include upgrades at Cotton Park in Coleraine and extensive expansion and upgrades in Wabana Township.



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