

Quarter 1, 2022 Newsletter

New Year, New Beginnings

Letter from the President

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has," Margaret Mead.

Our team has taken 2022 by storm, diving headfirst into initiatives and client work. We are building off the momentum of the Itasca Summit and other strategic work and partnerships from 2021, on top of a solid foundation of consultation, innovation, and leadership. We continue to challenge ourselves to deliver exceptional results and drive new strategic opportunities to our community.

The Forge is a prime example of engaging partners to collaborate on an effort that will benefit workforce and students as well as entrepreneurs and innovators. In 2021, we secured \$1.08M in grant funding to renovate, purchase equipment and develop programming for half of The Forge. This work was leveraged to apply for Minnesota DEED's Targeted Community Grant, which was awarded in March for an additional \$1.08M to complete renovations on the other half of the building as well as make improvements to the exterior.

In addition to The Forge, we have secured \$500K, over two years, from the McKnight Foundation's Vibrant & Equitable Communities Grant Program. We are thrilled by this award as it has flexibility to support our operations and initiatives across the board. With funds that are adaptable, we can address smaller projects that come unexpectedly throughout the year as well as support ongoing initiatives and expenses.

Also, in this first quarter, we were awarded Launch MN Hub Grant for the second year running. This \$100K will support Innovate 218 and our strategy to reach, support and lift local entrepreneurs and innovators. It is a great example of the work we put into creating Innovate 218, the taskforce, website and pitch



competitions.

In all of these programs and more, our team is dedicated to delivering superior results. We are always grateful for you, our partners, helping us achieve our goals to support our community in economic and community development.

Annual Meeting

IEDC's 2022 Annual Meeting took place on February 3rd at the Timberlake Lodge. We hosted 66 in-person and 10 online attendees. A pre-event social hour allowed for face-to-face engagement and networking. It was an engaging presentation dedicated to the collaborative efforts behind IEDC's 2021 success. Partners also told their story of greater impact in our community.



Thanks to all who were able to attend. To access the full video, follow the link below.

<https://bit.ly/watchannmeethere>



The Summit Advisory Group

The Summit Advisory Group will identify projects based on the 2021 Itasca Summit feedback and collaborate to bring these projects to life.

This group convened for the first time on February 24th, 2022, led by facilitators from Northspan. At the kick-off meeting, two project teams were formed: Community Development and Workforce. The next steps will be determined by each project team.

If this work interests you, call IEDC to get involved today!



First Friday Art Walk

IEDC has made a commitment to participate in First Friday Art Walks every quarter. We love to boost our local arts community and showcase Itasca County talent in a new light!

This quarter's first Friday took place on March 3rd and featured artwork from Kristen



Anderson, music by Adessa & Keith of Adessa & the Beat, catering by Four Season's Market, and desserts by Miss. Sara's Northern Treats Cupcakery. Over 50 people stopped in to enjoy.

Join us on at our next First Friday on June, 3rd, 2022.

Huber Huddle



On March 8th, Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), in partnership with Area Partnership for Economic Expansion (APEX), hosted the Huber Huddle. This event took place at the Timberlake Lodge and was meant to bring together community members and local area leaders to gain additional insight and support for the Huber Project in Cohasset. We are grateful for area leaders, partners in industry and community members that came to show their support for this important project.

After the Huber Huddle, the Cohasset City Council completed the following steps:

- The City adopts the Findings & Conclusions, including the responses to comments contained therein.
- The City makes a negative declaration on the need for an EIS for the Project.
- The City authorized and directs the appropriate officials to distribute this Resolution and the Findings & Conclusions as required by Minnesota Rule, part 4410.1700, subpart 5.

National SBDC Day & Engage

IEDC, in partnership with SBDC and Innovate 218, hosted a mini series of in-person and virtual networking sessions to showcase two local entrepreneurs for a National SBDC Day Celebration!

On Wednesday, March 16th, "Tap-In to Entrepreneurs" was held at Rapids Brewing Company. This event was a way for people in our region to interact and learn from local entrepreneurs, the Gilbert family, owners of 218 Style and Gilbert Contracting Services.



On Thursday, March 17th, "Engaging Entrepreneurs" took place virtually. This was the first of four Engage sessions to be held in 2022. This session was an interview with the Gilbert family, conducted by IEDC's Rob Sjostrand & Amanda Lamppa.



THE
McKNIGHT
FOUNDATION

Vibrant & Equitable Communities

In February, Itasca Economic Development Corporation received great news! We were awarded a \$500,000 McKnight Foundation Vibrant & Equitable Communities Grant! This is a tremendous opportunity for IEDC to provide additional support across all of our initiatives, with a focus on additional grant writing as well as expanding our programs around workforce recruitment (Thrive Up North). It allows our team to be nimble and address opportunities and issues as they arise with ready

funding to explore immediate need. We are incredibly grateful for this opportunity.

Targeted Community Grant (DEED)

In March, Itasca Economic Development Corporation received great news (again!) We were awarded a \$1,080,000 MN Targeted Community Grant from MN DEED. Together with our partners, IEDC will utilize this funding to develop the rest of The Forge. It will be used for capital improvements, equipment, signage, and exterior improvements on our Airport Road building. This grant, combined with 2021 grants will help us complete the renovation side of the project with plans to pursue funding for future programming.



Celebrating Teri Heikkila

After 22 years of dedicated service to Itasca Economic Development Corporation, Teri Heikkila has stepped out of fulltime status. She will continue part time as our Finance Manager.

While we're sad that we won't be seeing her as often, we want to congratulate Teri on an outstanding career. We know that she will be spending a lot of her time in the garden, at the lake, and with her grandchildren!

Thank you, Teri!



Welcome Nichole Arbour

New Business Consultant, Nichole Arbour started her role on March 8th.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, improving the community has long been a passion of Nichole's. After obtaining a degree in education from the College of Saint Benedict, Nichole began as an educator in Central MN and from there, moved to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area to pursue a career in customer implementation and corporate training.

Along the way, Nichole received her master's degree in Educational Leadership from St. Mary's University. Nichole's background in training, technology, education, communication, and project management makes her uniquely positioned to serve stakeholders at IEDC.



Innovate 218: An Innovation Station

In January we tandemly wrapped up reporting on 2021 Innovate 218 projects while writing our 2022-2023 LAUNCH MN grant. We are happy to report that we were awarded \$100,000 to continue the good and fun work started by Innovate 218 in 2021! We are humbled to have received these funds to help boost our entrepreneurial startup ecosystem here in NE Minnesota. It's a competitive market and a huge THANK YOU goes out to our Task Force and partners. We couldn't broadcast all the great events and opportunities available to our region without your



help, not to mention the skills and feedback you lend to refine what we are doing. We are grateful for all your expertise and time, which has helped the initiative succeed in Northeast MN.

Currently, Innovate 218 is sponsoring 24 entrepreneurs in our 10-week virtual lean canvas cohort which is led by ILT Academy. The 24 scholarships are paid for by the LAUNCH grant and we plan to offer the same series this fall for local entrepreneurs who have a business idea which needs iterating.

We will be hosting our second The RINK pitch competition on May 11th in Grand Rapids. We will award \$6k in scholarship funding to the winners - those brave enough to enter The RINK and share their enthusiasm about their business plan/idea!

Spread the word about Innovate 218 and join in our enthusiasm! The Start-Up entrepreneurial culture is building! Here's to boosting up the NE Minnesota folks who have great ideas and potential for new business startups.

Visit our new website today: <https://innovate-218.com/>



Thrive Up North, "Luring" You to Itasca

In 2020, area leaders came together to create a collaborative rural recruitment marketing campaign that showcases the Itasca County communities as a place that offers a great work life balance, a good place to start a business, and a great place to raise a family. Through the course of 2021, we relied heavily on the "storytelling" of Itasca County residents and shining a light on their Thrive Up North stories.

In 2021, our campaign ran well over industry standards and hit a few key milestones:

- All Media Tactic Impressions – 4,612,215
- Video Impressions – 1,015,231
- Top Domains for Creative: USA Today, People, Huff Post, NBC, CNN, Sports Illustrated, ESPN, Newsweek, Business Insider, MSN
- 5 families Released – Gernanders, Swansons, Meyers, Tanenbaum, Jared & Ryan of Timberwolf

In 2022, we are going to continue to focus on bringing workforce here in both manufacturing and healthcare fields. While we will still rely on the storytelling piece, like we already have with the Allen Family (stay tuned), we are going to be adding another piece to the Thrive Up North puzzle, an incentives program, "Luring" you to Itasca! This program is sure to entice even more people through cash, local business gift cards, and a peek at our arts culture. We hope

to start the incentives program in May or June. We're excited to "lure" more families to Itasca County: Hook, Line, and Sinker! Stay tuned for more excitement ahead!

SBDC: Threats to Opportunities

First Quarter of 2022, the start of a new year, has seen small businesses yet again reinventing themselves to match the market and hopefully find their "new normal" after two years of uncertainty. Supply chain issues, inflation, customer demand changes, and workforce are affecting all sectors and causing challenges for our small businesses. 'Resilient and adaptive' are the words that best describe our business community and we are honored to be working with them.



With these issues still in front of us, I am excited for all the prosperity, activity, and growth that our region has experienced and continues to show positive signs for 2022 and beyond.

Our mission in business consulting is to stay relevant and meet businesses where they need us currently. For each major area of concern, we have adapted a deeper dive methodology to help in addressing these major concerns for our business community.

Supply chain issues – we have been working to assist business owners understand inventory management and cash flow management within their business model.

Inflation – our continued strategy is to assist business owners with cost modeling, and assist in developing strategies for sustainability, cost mitigation and strategic planning.

Workforce – We are working with businesses to identify their needs, develop efficiencies within their business, and be strategic with their workforce. We have also begun work on programming and partnerships to offer upskilling training, business incubation and other items at the Forge, which will be operational in 2022! More details are coming on this project!

I have never been more honored to be part of our business community. We are here to assist you, at no cost and to help support our region!



Communicate, Collaborate, Advocate

At APEX, we like to say economic development is a team sport. It takes combined efforts to drive change and prosperity in Itasca County and throughout the larger APEX region. This includes our strategic partnership with IEDC, along with strong collaborative activity at the local, county and state level. As we kick off 2022 and our 12th year of partnership with IEDC, APEX continues to contribute to many efforts and projects looking to drive investment, change and prosperity throughout Itasca.

As we settle into a new year and wrap up Q1, we would like to recognize and celebrate the incredibly challenging work being done to bring projects to fruition in Itasca County and northeast Minnesota.

This work is hard-fought, largely because our regulatory process – which should be fair and predictable – is often derailed by a politically-motivated minority.

Opposition groups have no qualms with instigating frivolous lawsuits to delay projects which can both sustainably harvest our managed forests and create nonferrous mining opportunities. We must preserve the natural environment around us while also accessing the incredible bounty available in Itasca County and the APEX Region. We must do our part to build a future worth protecting.

Whether it be supporting the attraction of a large once in a lifetime opportunity in our forest industry or a local manufacturer or small business needing to expand to manage its scale and growth, it takes teamwork and collaboration, not just from the business itself and the supporting development team but also from the community members and leadership. Rising tides lift all ships; at APEX we look forward to our continued partnership with IEDC to do our part in rising the ship of economic prosperity in Itasca County.

Building Up Our Team & Community

CEDA is excited to announce our newest addition to the team, Henry Hellmann. Henry was born and raised in Deer River, MN where he grew up playing sports and enjoying the outdoors. He graduated from Deer River High School in 2013, and went on to attend Itasca Community College (ICC) where he earned his AA degree while playing basketball. After ICC he went on to the College St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN where he double majored, and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Marketing and Management.

Henry started his professional career as a loan processor and he maintained that job until 2022. In 2019, Henry was also hired as the men's basketball assistant coach at Itasca Community College. After realizing he had a passion for making a direct positive impact on others, Henry decided to pursue a different career path. In January 2022, Henry was hired as CEDA's Community & Business Development Specialist, where he will assist with community development and business outreach for all of Itasca County and surrounding areas.

His experience in the financial industry and education in marketing and management have allowed him to hit the ground running. Henry states, "I am very excited to make a positive impact on the area I grew up in and to support the cities and townships of Itasca County and the surrounding areas."

If you see Henry in your business or community, be sure to stop and say hello!





A "Strategic" Start to the Year

It's been a busy start to the year at the Entrepreneur Fund! Thus far in 2022 we have partnered with 29 small businesses and provided a total of \$1,180,535 in flexible financing to grow small business in Itasca County.



Our Grand Rapids **Be Strategic** Cohort kicked off on March 29. The Be Strategic program is a 6-week course that provides a unique opportunity for local non-competing businesses to work alongside each other to create a strategic business plan, network, and work on their business within a supportive group setting.

NEW Healthy Food Fund: A new specialized loan fund is available with low rates and competitive terms for local grocery stores, convenience stores, and food producers looking to upgrade equipment, expand their business, purchase inventory, hire staff, update store interior, purchase new or existing store and more. Contact Mike Korte at mikek@entrepreneurfund.org for more information.

Ignite Webinar: The Confidence Series

One of the most common barriers to business growth is the confidence of the entrepreneur behind it. The Women's Business Alliance is hosting the 2022 Ignite Confidence Series that will cover a range of topics that inspire a confident mindset, as well as the skills and resources needed to grow a business and reach your goals. The program will run from April – September 2022, for a total of 6 webinars. There is no cost to register, all are welcome. **To learn more and register click here.**

Strong partnerships with IEDC and many others are what enable us all to best serve the entrepreneurs and small business of Itasca County.

Click Here to Visit Our Events Calendar Today for Future Events!

IEDC
218-326-9411
www.itascadv.org

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