

## Quarter 2, 2023 - Newsletter

### Letter from the President

"It is not the beauty of a building you should look at; it is the construction of the foundation that will stand the test of time." - **David Allan Coe**.

2023 has been a year of building out our foundation. Strategic Plan? Check. Building client base? Check. Developing partnerships? Check. Why is this so important? Because economic development is not a sprint, it is a marathon. It is not saving or spending funds in one year, it is investing in our future as a community. Investing in small business owners, new and old, developing entrepreneurs, engaging in community outreach, and welcoming. This is not our grandfather's economic development, it is an evolving race, and it is our job not just to keep up with the pack, but to find a stride that will take us into the lead.



That is why IEDC is pushing the boundaries of traditional economic development. We are investing our time and energy into The Forge, Where Ideas Take Shape, not because we don't want to support small businesses, but because we want to support even more small businesses and entrepreneurs. We are committed to leading the way in welcoming in our community, not because we don't think we have wonderful communities, but because if we want to provide the workforce that is needed by our growing industries in manufacturing, healthcare, and more, we need to find a path where all feel welcome. IEDC is not yesterday's economic development organization, we are challenging the status quo, because we face one of our greatest challenges as a community yet, energy transition. We understand that now, 7-12 years ahead of this transition, is when we need to invest, plan, and develop a strategy that will not only carry us through this change but lift us up to be even stronger because of it.

What does that mean for IEDC? That means we will continue to push the envelope and work to pursue opportunities to bring funding, development, and growth to our community. We will invest *TODAY*, and not *HOPE* for a better tomorrow, but *WORK* for it. We welcome you as a partner, an advocate, an investor, and a community member to work with us towards a common goal. While we are not perfect, we will not let setbacks keep us from moving forward.

### SBDC Updates

SBDC work traditionally increases in the spring and 2023 is no exception. Of the 76 initial new clients in the first half of the year, 42 were in the second quarter. Additionally, the SBDC worked with a total of 132 clients in the first half of the year with 78 of those receiving services in the second quarter. We have been on this trajectory for the past few years and see no signs of slowing down in the business activities of our community.

With market conditions tightening, and cost of capital

rising, we are beginning to see national discussion on slowing of borrowing, and locally this is true as well. With interest rates hitting values not seen in many years, it is important to note that we are now operating in a “normal” business environment. With fluctuations happening, and interest expense a much larger factor, business owners are again looking for creative solutions to grow and expand in our area.

Our focus has continued this year in serving our entire county, and reaching all areas equally. We are proud of the success of our entire county, and the businesses we consult, and look forward to a robust second half of the year in 2023!

## SBA Awards Ceremony



## The Forge Updates

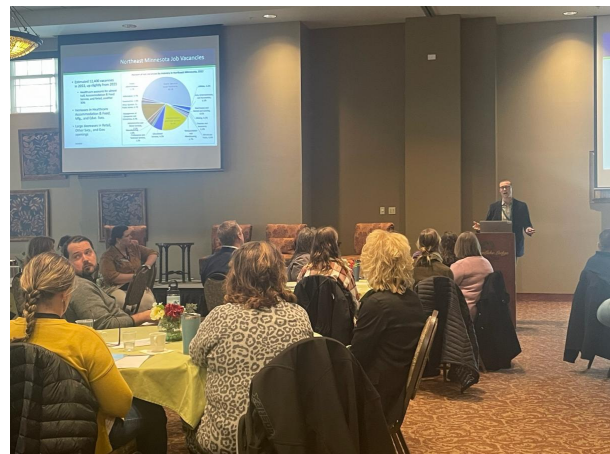
Second quarter of 2023 saw full construction focus at the Forge, with all rough framing completed, and electrical and mechanical taking shape throughout the facility. Incubator spaces took shape in phase 2, along with the artist space and common areas being identified and built out. Grand Opening of phase 1 is set for middle of August, and we are on track for this to be completed. Equipment is being ordered and arriving as quickly as possible, with more being identified as the process develops.



Our externs, representing IASC Next Career Pathways, have been busy commissioning equipment, and assisting with identifying additional items that are needed. Layouts of the education and entrepreneur spaces are being completed, potential users are visiting to see the space, and we are excited for all the new possibilities this space is bringing to Itasca County.

## 4-6-2023: Attract Me. Employ Me. Retain Me. Workforce Summit

How do you attract your employees? Furthermore, how do you employ and then retain them? The Attract Me, Employ Me, and Retain Me Workforce Summit was held on April 6 at the Timberlake event center. Through careful collaboration, we hosted 35 speakers and over 100 attendees! The Summit provided examples of tools and solutions for employers seeking to address their workforce shortages, and strategies to break down employment barriers. Speakers from DEED, JET, MN North College, AEOA, Itasca County Health, and some amazing leaders from local businesses included.



### Attract Me, Employ Me, and Retain Me Workforce Summit – By the Numbers:

- 105 attendees
- 60 unique organizations
- 15 different industry sectors
- 74 women
- 31 men



## THANK YOU TO ALL SPONSORS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

- **Gold:** AEOA and Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital
- **Silver:** Yanmar, Nelson Wood Shims, IRRR, Paul Bunyan Communications, and The Forge
- **Bronze:** NorthForce, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce

### 4-20-2023: Zenith Marketing Conference

Are you keeping up with AI? Have you even heard of ChatGPT? On April 20th, 2023, Operations & Outreach Manager, Kayla Swanson attended the Zenith Digital Marketing Conference in Duluth, MN. It was here where she really dug into AI and ChatGPT!

This was the tenth annual Zenith Marketing Conference, hosted by Aimclear and the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce. The conference is for all marketers who are interested in learning more about the ins and outs of digital marketing.

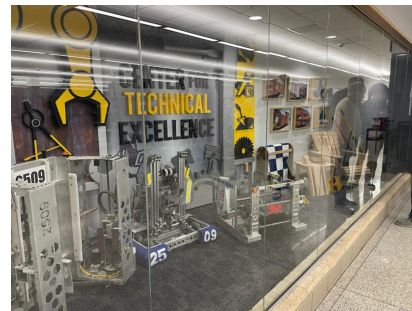
Kayla attended six different presentations covering various topics including but not limited to: SEO, AI, Local Search, and Nonprofit Marketing. The day was packed with valuable information and Kayla left with a notepad full of notes. The drive home wasn't as delightful: a snowstorm in Minnesota on April 20th! We shouldn't have been surprised!



### 4-28-2023: Tiger Path Visit

Working to connect high school education and employment is a top priority for economic developers nationwide.

On April 28th, Director of Business Development, Rob Sjostrand, and Business Consultant, Nichole Arbour, visited Tiger Path Academies. Tiger Path is a career and technical education facility housed in the Hutchinson High School.



This initiative was developed to embody the concept of seamlessly integrating traditional education with practical, hands-on experiences that are deeply connected to real-world workforce opportunities.

They visited Tiger Path with two high school business teachers and technical education teachers from IASC. Their hope was to model this idea through Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC) with the help of NEXT Career Pathways!

### 5-3-2023: SBDC Awards

Congratulations to our own local SBDC Consultants, Rob Sjostrand and Nichole Arbour, for their remarkable achievements at the 2023 National Small Business Week Awards Ceremony!

We take immense pride in announcing that the Northland SBDC, situated in Duluth and serving as the regional hub, has been honored with the prestigious SBDC Excellence & Innovation Award. This incredible accomplishment is a true testament to the unwavering dedication and hard work exhibited by its exceptional team (including our own consultants!).



The award was presented by none other than Governor Walz and Commissioner Guzman, adding an extra layer of significance to this recognition. We are absolutely thrilled to witness our consultants being acknowledged for their exceptional efforts in supporting the success of small businesses.

As we celebrate this momentous achievement, we look forward to another year of delivering top-notch

support to entrepreneurs and small business owners not only in Itasca County but also across broader horizons. Together, let's continue making a positive impact on businesses and fostering a thriving entrepreneurial community!

## 5-4-2023: Build North Housing Summit

The Build North Housing Summit was held on May 4 at the Timberlake event center. Through careful collaboration with Itasca County HRA, Kootasca, Habitat for Humanity, and some great partners including: APEX, CEDA, RAMS, and IRRR, we hosted 18 speakers and close to 100 attendees! Overall, the response to the Build North Housing Summit has been extremely positive, and attendees' acknowledgment of great discussions and a vast amount of information is truly encouraging. We are thrilled to have had some great partners at this important event, and we look forward to the possibility of future collaborations.

### Build North Housing Summit – By the Numbers:

- 94 attendees
- 10 different city officials
- 4 counties
- 1 tribal sovereign nation
- 47 women
- 47 men

### THANK YOU TO ALL SPONSORS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

- **Platinum:** Iseman Homes
- **Gold:** Yanmar, Park State Bank, Greater MN Housing Fund, Woodland Bank
- **Silver:** D.W.Jones, Deerwood Bank, Paul Bunyan Communications, Nelson Wood Shims
- **Bronze:** IRRR, Forward Health Foundation, City of Cohasset, True North Real Estate Co., Grand Rapids EDA



## 5-10-2023: Entrepreneurship Luncheon

What an exciting and enriching experience! The local business classes from Greenway High School and NK High School took initiative and organized an engaging Entrepreneurship Roundtable, where they had the opportunity to interact with local entrepreneurs and with business consultants, Nichole Arbour and Rob Sjostrand.

Over a delightful lunch at the Timberlake, students and guests engaged in vibrant discussions about the students' entrepreneurial aspirations and future plans. The event provided an incredible platform for the students to receive valuable insights and advice from seasoned professionals in the business world.

The overwhelming response from the students was truly heartening, as they expressed feeling supported and motivated to pursue their dreams and future goals. Such opportunities to interact with real-world entrepreneurs and consultants can be transformative for young minds, igniting their passion and determination to carve their path in the world of business.



## 5-9-2023: The Rink

All good things come to an end! With the end of the latest cohort also comes the RINK pitch competition. Anyone in Minnesota who has a business idea can submit their idea for a chance to talk LIVE about their business idea and win some cash to go



towards their business idea.

Since 2021 we have hosted 4 pitch competitions giving out \$32,000 in monies to the winners. This most recent competition was held in Chisholm MN on May 9<sup>th</sup> and the first-place winner was Rebekah Evingson for her idea on a holistic approach to helping patients recover after orthopedic surgery. Second place went to Josh Oswald for his life preserving creation of live food for fish enthusiasts. Third place went to Renee Cole for her idea of life coaching for those living with Lyme disease.



## 5-17-2023: Nontraditional Lender's Forum

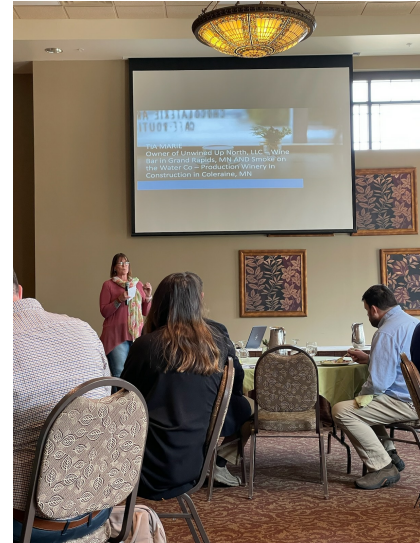
During the Non-Traditional Lenders forum, Business Consultant, Nichole Arbour gave an insightful presentation on the Northland SBDC's services and its significant economic impact in the Northland region. We extend our gratitude to our friends at NorthSpan and Timberlake for hosting this valuable event.

Throughout the forum, industry leaders highlighted the numerous benefits associated with non-traditional lenders. They emphasized the importance of finding a lender who can tailor the terms to suit the specific needs of current and aspiring business owners, thus paving the way for their success.

The event featured an impressive lineup of presenters, including:

- Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC)
- Area Partnership for Expansion (APEX)
- Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR)
- Entrepreneur Fund
- Great River Energy
- Innovate 218 – Amanda Lamppa
- Northland Foundation
- Northspan Group, Inc.
- Minnesota Business Finance Corporation (MBFC)

The collective expertise and insights shared by these presenters undoubtedly provided attendees with valuable information to make informed financial decisions and facilitate their business endeavors. Such forums play a pivotal role in empowering entrepreneurs and bolstering economic growth in the Northland region.



## 5-22-2023: Mille Lacs Tribal Economy Summit

Mille Lacs Tribal Summit took place in late May at the Grand Casino. There was a focus on how and why modern systems seem to foster fragility within the growth of local entrepreneurialism. There seems to be a shift toward focusing on building wealth for cities though growth.



How can cities make development easier while still holding the bar high? How can we embrace and respond to what the city wants to see? Likewise, how do folks 'use' the city? Are there ways to do some simple development by using existing spaces better? The shift is a focus on creating environments where small businesses can thrive and help break down the barriers which previously have made for some tenuous growth.

City planning is placemaking of assets which will make towns more friendly and help to attract and retain good environments which foster growth. This environment leads to wealth for the community, thriving towns, and vibrant entrepreneurialism.

## 6-2-2023: First Friday

On June 2nd, 2023 we hosted our quarterly First Friday Art Walk, by Grand Rapids Arts! We always love these events. They're a great way for members of our community to stop in, enjoy great food, live music, and explore our arts community in a different light.

June's First Friday Art Walk featured music by Samsosche Sampson, as well as visual arts by Sam. There were delicious appetizers, provided by Pinched Catering Co., and cookies provided by Dragonfly Coffee by ILO.

Samsosche brought his performing hoops and his family showed our team how to be a falcon and then a butterfly. We were extremely happy with the turnout from community members this time around. We had our highest attendance of over 150 people. The evening gave us sunshine, a sun-shower, and then a rainbow!



## 6-12-2023: Presentation for The REIF

That's truly remarkable! The arts in Minnesota make an incredible economic impact of over \$1 billion annually!

We're thrilled to share that President Tamara Lowney and Business Consultant Nichole Arbour were granted the privilege to present at the Minnesota Presenter's Network Summer Conference.

Their presentation centered around exploring the dynamic relationship between economic development and the arts. Attendees were enlightened with insights into the vital roles played by Itasca Economic Development (IEDC) and Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in fostering economic growth. They emphasized how the arts have become a pivotal element in shaping the economic landscape of Itasca County. This connection between creativity and economic prosperity underscores the importance of nurturing the arts community in the region.



It's truly inspiring to witness our experts contributing their knowledge and expertise to further the appreciation and understanding of the arts' role in driving economic success in Minnesota and beyond.

## 6-26-2023: Day of Connections

We were able to bring resources right to the people this June! Alongside Paul Bunyan Communications and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, IEDC helped host a Day of Connections event at King Elementary in Deer River, Minnesota.

The event took place from 11:00 am - 6:00 pm. Lunch was served by ISD 317 Food Service at \$5.00 per person. Dinner was served by Community Cafe and was free to the public.

Between lunch and dinner, attendees were able to explore 28 booths. These booths ranged in a variety of resources from employment, health services, housing, and education. We consider the event a success!

Check out the statistics below:

- 104 total people in attendance (this is both workers & attendees)
- 20 tribal ID's created
- 3 broadband sign-ups





- 23 birth certificates printed

To witness people receiving resources in their community is always enlightening. It shows people that organizations are willing to meet them right where they are!

## 6-28/29/30-2023: EDAM

"Continuous learning is the minimum requirement for success in any field," Brian Tracy. One of our goals is to hold a wealth of knowledge, enabling us to deliver the essential information our clients and partners require for their success.

Five team members attended the EDAM Summer Conference in Rochester, MN. Attendees were able to explore a variety of topics relevant to modern-day economic development.

These topics included but were not limited to:

- Housing Developments
- Community Planning
- Business Growth
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Workforce Retention

Attending EDAM conferences is always an exciting experience, but it becomes even more gratifying when your own organization gets the chance to present. The Forge session, presented by Rob Sjostrand, Tamara Lowney, and Board Member Bart Johnson, was truly remarkable. Spanning an hour, their presentation guided attendees through the entire Forge process, from beginning to end. Attendees were engaged and asked multiple questions regarding funding, partnerships, and construction processes!

We can't wait to get the chance to attend EDAM's Winter Conference. Until then, more learning will take place right here in our community.



## Innovate 218 Updates

We are so thrilled to announce that Northspan will be taking the helm of Innovate 218! IEDC was awarded the grant in late 2020 to be the hub of the LAUNCH initiative to boost up the entrepreneurial ecosystem in NE Minnesota. It was decided that we would tackle serving 9 counties by offering to pay the tuition of our regions entrepreneurs who wanted to take part in a virtual 10-week cohort which would assist them in creating a lean business canvas to help them iterate out their business ideas.

Our fourth cohort ended late April and we were able to look at the data. Each county indeed did have entrepreneurs who took part in this momentum! Ninety-three NE Minnesota entrepreneurs are better poised to tackle business ownership because of our collaboration with ILT academy, who taught the 10-week cohort. Many networking events also facilitated a better understanding among our professional colleagues in the area to help build onto this momentum. All this networking has provided a greater understanding of what each entity does to be able to better serve our economic ecosystem.

It has been an honor to start this program- set the tone of what LAUNCH is trying to create with these funds and watch the entrepreneurs get into the wide array of services available to them within Minnesota.



## Thrive Up North Updates

Live, Work, and Play. The things we do everyday. Rural recruitment has become a key topic in the forefront of economic development. How do we get businesses, workforce, and residents alike to come live, work, and play in our area? Thrive Up North has helped answer that in Itasca County.

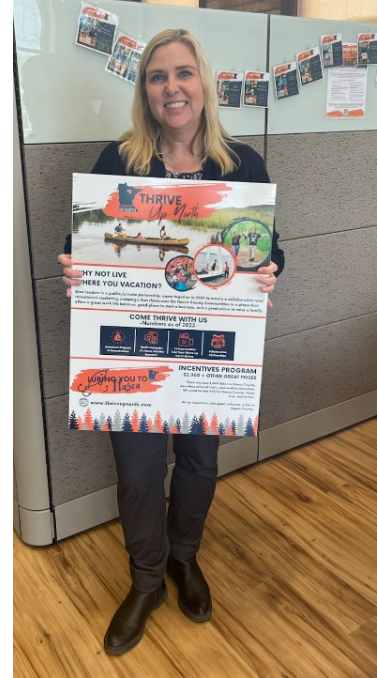
So far in 2023, our incentives program has continued to welcome new residents ready to go to work for employers in Itasca County. We have given out seven incentives packages in 2023.

Those residents were recently employed by the following:

- Lake Country Power
- Bigfork Valley Clinic & Hospital
- Yanmar
- North Homes
- KMDA
- Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital
- NoPo Coffee Co.

Aside from the incentives package, these new residents have agreed that the move to the Itasca County area is an incentive in itself. The access to nature, rural health care, safe neighborhoods, and great employment have been just a few of the reasons that new residents have chosen to Thrive Up North.

Be on the lookout for our next video: [www.thriveupnorth.com](http://www.thriveupnorth.com).



## Welcoming Communities Updates

"An open door is a welcome that makes a stranger into a friend," - unknown.

That is exactly what we are working towards with our welcoming communities initiative. From the beginning, IEDC has been committed to making our community a more welcoming place.

Our efforts in the Local Indian Council (LIC) communities have really taken off. We've hosted three Day of Connections events: one in Inger, one in Ball Club, and one in Deer River. Amanda has helped start a park project in Inger and is extremely happy with the way that her relationships are forming. Kayla was asked by S.Lake Chair, Gary Charwood to participate in the Anishinaabe Spirit Run. She is also planning a Day of Connections event in S.Lake during fourth quarter. Tamara helped the Ball Club LIC with a Community Planning day. This event was well attended. Many Ball Club community members came out to share their thoughts on what exactly is needed in their community. Above all, through this work, we appreciate the fact that we really have turned strangers into friends.



Aside from the LIC work, our cohort with the University of Minnesota Extension office still continues. Our last cohort meeting will take place in October. So far, we have learned a lot from the extension educators. They really help our group see the meaning behind inclusivity and equity. Our group includes a variety of community champions who want to do all they can to make our community the best it can be.

## APEX Updates

**Regional Site Readiness: Being Proactive for Future Development Opportunities**



### **The Process**

Regional economic development efforts are essential to the success of Itasca County and the APEX region. By working together, multiple partners can support site identification, evaluation, and ranking of sites from best to worst. This process can be complex, but it is essential to ensure that the region and individual locals are able to attract and retain businesses and jobs.

The first step in the process is to identify potential sites for development. This can be done by conducting a site survey, which will identify ownership and physical characteristics of the site, such as its location and size. The survey will also identify any environmental or other constraints such as easements and encumbrances, that may affect the development of the site.

Once potential sites have been identified, they need to be evaluated. The evaluation will consider factors such as the site's location, access to transportation, and environmental impact. The criteria to determine suitability for the proposed use includes logistical assets like highways, rail, ports and access to infrastructure like adequate power, water, sewer and broadband, as well as its potential impact on the communities and Sovereign Nations in the surrounding area.

The final step is to rank the sites from best to worst using a ranking matrix developed on known and estimated criteria. This is done based on the results of the site survey and evaluation. The highest-ranked sites will be those that are most suitable for the proposed development/use and have the least impact on the surrounding area and cost to develop.

### **The Importance of Economic Development Efforts**

Economic development efforts can be a complex process, but they are essential to the success of any community or region. By working together, multiple partners can support site identification, evaluation, and ranking of sites from best to worst. Focusing our effort and financial resources on the best site opportunities for development is an important part of business attraction, retention and job creation.

In addition to the steps outlined above, there are several other factors that need to be considered when undertaking regional economic development efforts. These include:

- Availability of skilled labor
- Cost of living
- Quality of life
- Availability of infrastructure
- Regulatory environment

By taking all of these factors into account, regional and local economic development efforts can be more successful in attracting and retaining businesses and jobs. APEX and IEDC, with the support of many regional partners, are currently reviewing 13 newly identified sites ranging from 40 to 200 acres in Itasca County for future business attraction and expansion efforts.

By being proactive and taking the necessary steps to ensure regional site readiness, Itasca County and the APEX region can position themselves for success in the years to come.



## **Entrepreneur Fund Updates**

We've doubled down on our commitment to serving the region's entrepreneurs by **strategically growing our organization and leadership capacity**. We've grown because you've grown!

And that growth is evident in Itasca County. Through the combination of small business loans and strategic advising, EFund has supported the growth of 49 businesses and invested \$1.2 million in Itasca County so far this year!

As part of our growth, we've added a new role to our leadership team. Join us in welcoming Martha Bremer, Director of Strategic Partnerships, to our team. Martha brings a wealth of leadership experience to EFund. She is eagerly looking forward to making connections with our Itasca County partners and working together to empower the local entrepreneurs who sustain the regional economy.



For more EFund news and program updates, **[subscribe to receive our emails.](#)**



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