



PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS Southern Minnesota

Creating economic development strategies for regional strength.

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Partner Update

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New Name, Same Goals

What's in a name? A Partnership! The new name, Partnership for Regional Competitiveness – Southern Minnesota, replaces the former Southern Minnesota Regional Competitiveness Project. This stems from a meeting of the "Key Contacts/Leaders," henceforth referred to simply as the "Partners." These people participate as representatives of the six industry working groups.

A meeting of these "Partners" was held on October 13, 2009 at Newport Labs in Worthington. Five goals were suggested and will be discussed further at the next Partner meeting on December 15. These include:

- Implement region-wide venture capital opportunities
- Establish debt capital opportunities
- Design and implement a Business Accelerator Program to support commercialization opportunities
- Design and implement regional "celebrations" of project successes
- Identify, support and convene "network" opportunities

A detailed matrix of these goals, along with associated activities, expected outcomes, timelines, and a listing of the Partners taking responsibility/ownership will be available soon.

Success Story



People define success in a number of ways. In business, the most recognizable way is by measuring the bottom line: dollars and cents. However, when exploring a new way of approaching business, sometimes success is defined by what makes dollars and *sense*.

CAB Construction of Mankato, Metal Services of Blooming Prairie, and ProManufacturing of Albert Lea are three companies that are involved in metal fabrication services. Some of their specialties overlap, while each covers unique areas as well.

In a bold move, leaders from the three businesses set aside the traditional competition that can fragment, and thus shrink, their market share. Instead, they put their three companies' heads together and formed a bond that has opened opportunities to expand their market. The seed they have planted is called the Southern Minnesota Manufacturers Alliance (SMMA).

Denny Heimerman, CEO of Metal Services, explains, "You have to think bigger. You have to get beyond where you are today." Now leaders are working carefully on a business model that will benefit all three companies.

According to Bonnie Betts, registered owner of CAB Construction, "We share a commonality of ethics, where we can support each other in a drive to produce quality products."

Recognizing the potential for 'filling each other's gaps,' Jim Troe, general manager of ProManufacturing, describes how the alliance is approaching potential collaborative projects. "We're trying to bring different skill sets together to create a seamless feeling for the customer, based on accountability and efficiency," states Troe.

This type of alliance demonstrates the potential that exists in the region when companies explore a new brand of thinking. It's one way we can define success.

Partner Interviews

Tim Penny - President & CEO, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation



"We've got the pieces, and this project creates the glue that will bring those pieces together."

How would you describe your Foundation's role in the Partnership?

We are fully committed to this collaborative. We've dedicated staff time to this region-wide strategy, through the planning process that occurred over a year's time. We will continue to devote staff time to any logistical support that this project requires. We are very conscious of aligning our resources with regional goals.

What direct impact do you see as a result of the Partnership—for southern Minnesota, and beyond?

Greater focus and awareness of key areas of potential growth—and that awareness cannot be overstated. We now have this blueprint that elevates our understanding of the need for greater cooperation, communication flow, and networking to maximize the resources of the region.

I think we'll get more bang for the buck helping a new business grow, or to assist in creating a start-up business. We've got the pieces, and this project creates the glue that will bring those pieces together.

Like the Southern Minnesota Manufacturers Alliance (SMMA) [see related article in this newsletter]—that wouldn't have happened except for bringing them together around a table to learn from one another; to find common ground that creates mutual benefit. This project is taking that to a whole new level.

How do you see the Partnership's future unfolding?

The project creates a critical mass. There's indigenous strength here. We have the potential to be a bioscience/biobusiness Mecca, very much like the research triangle in North Carolina, or high-tech and communications technology in Silicon Valley in California. Creating the alignment maximizes the potential. Once you've got that, it's like a magnet. Others will start to view southern Minnesota as a destination for this kind of business enterprise and it'll take on a life of its own.

Sherry Ristau - President & CEO, Southwest Initiative Foundation



"The potential is very exciting."

How would you describe your Foundation's role in the Partnership?

We've been a key partner throughout the initiative. We helped with some of the early convening—bringing the right people to the table. There are both business and organizational leaders in this region who identify us as the link to this project. They look to us for leadership.

What direct impact do you see as a result of the Partnership—for southern Minnesota, and beyond?

It has brought together organizational leaders to think about how we can best move forward with the economic assets of southern Minnesota. People have been gathered who can play a role in advancing the economy in this part of the state.

There are opportunities for the two Initiative Foundations to work together and bring business leaders together who have the resources, expertise and knowledge to take these economic assets to a new level. The Foundations will play a key role, because we have relationships with business people in the area.

How do you see the Partnership's future unfolding?

The potential is very exciting. Collaboration is hard, hard work, and of course, everyone wants to be attached to something successful. I really appreciate the efforts being made to create a consistent message and keep everyone on the same page. It's critical that we give updates and continue to let people know what's going on.

The Center's Role

Brad Finstad - Executive Director, Center for Rural Policy and Development



"We encompass that 30,000-foot view of the region—we're not here just for southeast, southwest, or central Minnesota. We're a statewide organization that's all about advancing rural Minnesota," states Brad

The Center came in at a transition time when the original research was wrapping up and proposals were being put together to establish the Regional Competitiveness Project. At that point, the Center filled the role as administrator/facilitator. "We were brought in to help organize the region into a structure that could achieve the results of the action plans," explains Finstad.

As the Center works to formalize the network within the region, it's important to have a structure that's easy to understand and use—so people can get in and out of it as they choose, to continue advancing the regional economic plan.

Going forward, the Center will continue to work with and grow this regional network of leaders who can gather around the table, roll up their sleeves, and get things done. The Center is available to conduct research as groups are formed, or be a conduit for dealing with legislative concerns or policy issues to help advance rural Minnesota.

A key goal is to instill the attitude that what's good for Marshall is good for Winona, and so on. It's a seemingly unnatural concept that people in Rochester would hope that Worthington sees job growth because that will benefit Rochester as well. Yet that's the kind of thinking that will propel this project toward a successful future.

If you have questions, comments, or input, please contact:

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