

## growth SPURTS

NURTURING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Everyone wants his or her community to thrive. Communities throughout North Dakota and Minnesota have been striving for years to improve their economic potential and provide opportunities for their businesses and workers. Some have met with great success while others continue to struggle to sustain economic development efforts.

What are the secrets of success? Hard work, dedicated volunteers, a clear mission and vision, a commitment to fostering talent and technology, and a seemingly unlimited amount of enthusiasm.

Here is a look at two organizations that continue to make great strides. The groups share several perspectives and characteristics, yet draw on diverse resources, provide distinct services, and serve unique regions.

### **Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation**

With a combined population approaching 60,000, Grand Forks, ND, and East Grand Forks, MN, serve as the hub of the upper Red River Valley. Grand Forks Region EDC focuses on retention and expansion of local businesses as well as attraction of new companies to the region, which roughly spans from Devils Lake, ND, east to Thief River Falls, MN, and from the Canadian border south to Hillsboro, ND. Initiated in 1967 as a development foundation, Grand Forks Region EDC was incorporated in 1988.

Klaus Thiessen, President and CEO of the nonprofit organization, easily rattles off the area's assets. "Our strengths are the University and its research and technology centers, our proximity to the Canadian border, the Red River Valley Research Corridor, and all infrastructure is new since 1997," when floods ravaged Grand Forks and the surrounding area.

Thiessen credits the EDC's successes to its volunteers, the 20-member Board of Directors, and the city's and state's business-friendly environment. He emphasizes the area's quality of life, its cutting-edge infrastructure, technology, and educational and health care systems, and North Dakota's competitive corporate and personal tax structures as well as its status as a right-to-work state.

"North Dakota is very flexible," adds Thiessen, with the only state-owned bank in the nation. Established in 1919, Bank of North Dakota is a funding resource to groups like Grand Forks Region EDC as well as other financial institutions and guarantee agencies. Another unique financial partner, the City of Grand Forks was the first in the nation to establish a growth fund, allowing the city to take an equity position in local enterprises.

### **Joint Economic Development Commission**

Bemidji is a growing community of roughly 13,000 in the heart of Minnesota's northern pines and lakes region. The Joint Economic Development Commission was formed in 1985 to support job and wealth generation for Beltrami County and the greater Bemidji area, which includes southern Beltrami County and northern Hubbard County. The commission provides loans through its revolving fund, equity investments, and grants to help grow and strengthen local manufacturing and high-end service companies. Since its inception, JEDC has invested over \$2.5 million in area businesses.

JEDC Executive Director Larry Young extols the region's assets, including "four institutions of higher learning, state-of-the-art fiber-optic telecommunications, a major health care center, the government center, and the fourth busiest airport in Minnesota."

JEDC’s 28-member board is critical to the organization’s success. “They’re the movers and the shakers,” says Young, adding, “They become the eyes and ears of the community.” They’re also contributing to what Young sees as “an evolution” occurring in economic development. Beyond JEDC’s traditional roles of providing financing, business assistance, recruiting, and marketing information, “we are spinning off new groups and services,” Young states. JEDC has been a catalyst for groups such as the Bemidji Area Forestry Affairs Council, representing production, management, and policy. Recently, the council gained Mn/DOT support to keep forest roads open one extra week for timber hauling during the spring thaw. The adjustment may seem modest, but it translates into thousands of dollars in additional revenue for loggers without negative impact on the forests or roads. Young’s enthusiasm is evident as he states “JEDC is giving birth to new organizations and enabling them to address issues in new ways.”

**A Few Words to the Wise**

Thiessen and Young agree when offering advice to communities and individuals who want to grow their cities or regions:

- Volunteerism—Both men cited their organizations’ dependence upon volunteers. “We couldn’t do any of this without them,” says Thiessen. “It’s all about team.”

(continued on page 5)

**success STORIES**

These businesses received assistance from their local economic development agencies to locate or expand in their respective cities. They continue to succeed in their communities, providing jobs and supporting the economic base of their regions.

**LM Glasfiber**

Grand Forks Region EDC played a major role in LM Glasfiber’s decision to locate its only North American manufacturing operation in Grand Forks. LM Glasfiber—the world’s leading manufacturer of blades for wind turbines—has manufacturing facilities in Denmark, Spain, the United States, India, and China. Headquartered in Lunderskov, Denmark, LM Glasfiber has approximately 2,500 employees worldwide. The 83,000 sq.ft. facility was designed specifically for the company and features modern manufacturing equipment, 120-foot bridge cranes, a state-of-the-art ventilation system for removal of styrene odors, and a hazardous materials storage area that includes fire-rated walls, explosion venting, and a containment system.



**New Flyer**

New Flyer’s Crookston, MN, manufacturing facility is one of three in North America. Headquartered in Winnipeg, Manitoba, New Flyer is North America’s largest manufacturer of transit buses, with more heavy-duty buses in revenue service than any other manufacturer. The 89,000 sq.ft. Crookston facility employs 300 and serves as the final assembly plant for Winnipeg and St. Cloud operations.



**Valley Technology Park**

Encouraging the growth of agriculture and technology businesses in Northwest Minnesota, this business incubator is the result of collaboration among Valley Technology Park, city and county leaders, Northwest Minnesota Foundation, University of Minnesota–Crookston, USDA Rural Development, and Crookston Development Authority. The 16,000 sq.ft. building accommodates six bays, including one that is food-grade. VTP supports start-ups by offering economical space as well as administrative and managerial support provided by University of Minnesota–Crookston staff.



# ask the EXPERT

**Q** Why did my road get dug up so many times when the city put water and sewer in?

**A** While sewer and water installation is typically part of one big project, four distinct operations occur during construction:

- 1 The main sanitary sewer line is installed first, parallel to and near the center of the road. This pipe is normally placed the deepest and needs the largest backhoe.
- 2 The second dig occurs when sanitary sewer services are connected to the mainline sanitary sewer pipe and extended to the property lines, perpendicular to the road.
- 3 The third excavation takes place when the water mainline is installed parallel to the roadway and at least ten feet away from the sewer main.
- 4 The fourth and final dig happens when water services are connected to the mainline water pipe and extended to the property lines, perpendicular to the road. ■



Kevin Wernberg, PE, is a civil engineer and vice president with Widseth Smith Nolting.

## public SIGHTINGS

**Cass County (MN) Highway Department** received the Project of the Year award from the Minnesota County Engineers Association for CSAH 13 highway and bridge improvements near Walker (MN).

**Mn/DOT** earned finalist honors from the American Concrete Pavement Association at its 15th annual Excellence in Concrete Pavement awards for the Highway 10 unbonded overlay project in Todd County (MN).

**Crow Wing County (MN) Highway Department** received a Merit Award of Construction Excellence from Mn/DOT, the Minnesota Asphalt Pavement Association, and the U.S. Federal Highway Administration for CSAH 20/Riverside Drive improvement project.

North Dakota Ready Mix & Concrete Products Assoc. presented its Excellence in Concrete award to **Brainerd Public Schools** (MN) for the use of precast concrete in the new 339,000 sq.ft. Forestview Middle School.

**Fosston (MN) Community Library and Arts Center** received Northwest Minnesota Foundation's Project Excellence award, part of the foundation's Excellence and Circle of Vision Awards.

**Tim Moe**, PE, was named president of Widseth Smith Nolting.

**Bruce Buxton**, PE, LS, president of Widseth Smith Nolting from 1994 to 2005, was named chairman of the board.

**Mark Ostgarden** was hired as Brainerd (MN) city planner.

**Duane Blanck**, PE, Crow Wing County (MN) Engineer, was reappointed to the Minnesota Board of AELSLAGID.

**Bryan Hargrave** was hired as planning and zoning coordinator of Crosslake (MN).

The following WSN professionals met the requirements necessary to become registered professionals in MN: **Brent Dammann**, AIA, and **Mark Eskildsen**, AIA, architects; **Lee Cariveau**, PE, **James Hines**, PE, and **Michael Rude**, PE, civil engineers; and **Brian Hoffart**, LS, land surveyor. **Deb Parrott**, AIA, received LEED accreditation. ■

If you have a "public SIGHTING," please contact Liesa Thill, Widseth Smith Nolting, 218.829.5117, [lthill@wsn-mn.com](mailto:lthill@wsn-mn.com).

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# outside the LINES

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## CLEAN UP, WITHOUT GETTING CLEANED OUT

### NEW GUIDELINES ISSUED FOR PETROLEUM CONTAMINATION IN UTILITY PROJECTS, PETROFUND REIMBURSEMENT AVAILABLE

Utility projects constructed within public rights-of-way often encounter soils contaminated by nearby petroleum tank releases. Risks include exposure to contaminants, environmental impacts, and, in severe cases, fire or explosions. As a result, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has published new guidelines for managing petroleum-contaminated soils discovered in right-of-way utility projects. The good news, however, is the Petrofund offers reimbursement under the following conditions:

- The project must be located within a utility easement or in a right-of-way owned and/or managed by the state, an agency of the state, or a political subdivision.
- Only utility projects are eligible.
- The petroleum contamination must have originated from a tank.

A “Request to Take Corrective Action Letter,” issued by the MPCA Utility Coordinator, is required for reimbursement. The letter may be obtained prior to or during a project, but it must be issued before any contaminated soil is excavated.

The MPCA offers suggestions to ensure reimbursement and avoid project delays:

- Plan ahead—Identify locations where contamination may be encountered. Look for active petroleum-related businesses, conduct interviews and look for evidence of past petroleum-related uses, and research MPCA and other available records.
- Hire an environmental consultant—Arrange for a consultant experienced in contaminated site work to be present or on-call during construction.
- Work with the MPCA—Contact the MPCA Utility Coordinator prior to project start up and ask for a “Request to Take Corrective Action Letter.”

If contamination is unexpectedly discovered, a “Request to Take Corrective Action Letter” will be issued by the MPCA provided the petroleum-contaminated soil has not already been excavated. To ensure Petrofund reimbursement, be prepared to stop work in contaminated areas until the MPCA Utility Coordinator issues the letter. ■



Brian Ross, PG, is an environmental scientist and vice president with Wiseth Smith Nolting.

## hind SIGHTS

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Perhaps it’s a smell lofted on a breeze, or the particular angle of the sun filtered through the trees, but virtually everyone has a trigger that says “summer.” From baseball to travel to cool refreshments, here are a few of our favorite historical warm-weather tidbits:

**44 years ago . . .** Roger Maris (born in Hibbing, MN, and raised in Fargo, ND) broke Babe Ruth’s single-season home run record with 61 home runs.

**51 years ago . . .** on July 12, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower proposed a national highway modernization program, which came to be known as the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways—or, as most know it, “The Interstate System.”

**64 years ago . . .** the sculptures on Mount Rushmore were officially completed.

**83 years ago . . .** the Eskimo Pie was granted Patent No. 1,404,539.

**104 years ago . . .** the first navigation signs were installed on major American roads.

**121 years ago . . .** the first roller coaster built in the United States—the “Gravity Pleasure Switchback Railway”—began operation June 16 on Coney Island. ■

- Focus on total employment vs. unemployment—JEDC compiles information detailing how many people in the region have the specific skills or training needed by the prospect.
- Foster talent, technology, and training—The Bemidji area has a great resource in Paul Bunyan Telephone Cooperative, which is always exploring new technology. According to Young, “We have technology that companies need and that bigger cities don’t even have yet.”
- Retention—According to Thiessen, “Our biggest opportunities may be in local expansions.” Keep in contact with local businesses, and see what their needs are and whether they’re being met. Young adds, “You need to continually work to retain the businesses you have in place.”
- Make “remoteness” an asset—Grand Forks Region EDC sees a future in combating bioterrorism and infectious disease. “We’re two hours from a Level 4 infectious disease lab. Our isolation, access to talent, and partnership with UND life sciences researchers as well as the Red River Valley Research Corridor position this region to become a bioterror and infectious disease corridor,” says Thiessen.
- Set the groundwork—Stay focused and realistic, know the region’s strengths and weaknesses, and obtain the necessary financial resources.

- Build consensus—Communicate the reality of doing business in your area. “Sure, you might occasionally hit a home run,” says Young, “but your local entrepreneurs are more likely to consistently get singles and doubles, and those hits also win ball games.”

**Make More of Your Community**

Create more high-quality jobs . . . nurture more vibrant communities . . . improve the quality of life in your region. How? Get involved. Become a part of local and regional economic development efforts. As these successful organizations have shown, it takes teamwork and the energies of several people, but the rewards to your communities will be worth it. ■

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**quick LINKS**

For more information, check out these websites and follow their links to economic development resources . . .

- alexmn.org** Alexandria Area Economic Development Commission
- banknd.com** Bank of North Dakota
- bemidjiusa.com** Joint Economic Development Commission
- bladc.org** Brainerd Lakes Area Development Corporation
- ci.bemidji.mn.us** City of Bemidji
- co.beltrami.mn.us** Beltrami County
- co.grand-forks.nd.us** Grand Forks County
- crookstoneda.com** Crookston Development Authority

- deed.state.mn.us** Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- edam.org** Economic Development Association of Minnesota
- grandforks.org** Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation
- grandforksgov.com** City of Grand Forks
- growingnd.com** North Dakota Department of Commerce
- iedconline.org** International Economic Development Council
- mrdo.org** Minnesota Regional Development Organizations
- theresearchcorridor.com** Red River Valley Research Corridor



New Flyer—Crookston, MN

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO NURTURE GROWTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



ENGINEERING ARCHITECTURE LAND SURVEYING ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

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