

**MACKINAC ECONOMIC ALLIANCE**  
**Director's Report**  
**April 18, 2016**

On Friday March 4, 2016 MEA Board members Dean Reid, Gary Reid and Lester Livermore joined Anne Ottaway and Caroline Crecelius at a meeting with Lighthouse (Steve Mason) and the IDS (Jason Kronemeyer and Steve Gordon) to decide on realistic strategies for improving improve broadband access in Mackinac County. Taking into account the proposed Gigabit Community Project introduced at our January meeting with Steve and Jason, there was a thorough analysis of the current Federal broadband maps for the EUP and a discussion about the importance to correct misleading conclusions. Attention was then focused on the Mackinac County communities best suited for the pilot program. The steps required to conduct the pilot were introduced. Underpinning the success of these programs is the completion of surveys by a majority of residents. Various creative methods to accomplish this were offered and noted for inclusion in the planned presentations to selected communities.

Following a series of deep dive discussions with Lighthouse (Steve Mason) and the ISD (Jason Kronemeyer) MEA prepared a factual Powerpoint Presentation to introduce the Gigabit Community Project. These presentations were delivered by Lester Livermore to Brevort Township (4/11), Portage Township (4/12) and Clark Township (April 18<sup>th</sup>). Lester was convincing in making the case for the projects, underscoring its importance to the economic development of our region and asking for Townships support in tackling a daunting but achievable challenge. As importantly, it will be necessary for each and every MEA Board member to champion this initiative. We will follow up with specifics as to how in the coming weeks.

As mentioned at our last meeting Michigan Manufacturers Association requested MEA to convene manufacturers in the EUP for a forum to discuss their manufacturing challenges. On Monday, April 25<sup>th</sup> MMA CEO and President Chuck Hadden will meet with representatives from manufacturers in Luce, Chippewa and Mackinac counties at the SmartZone in Sault Saint Marie. MEA personally reached out to over 30 companies to invite them to attend this forum.

As part of its commitment to advance recreational initiatives for Portage Township MEA circled back with the Sault Tribe to try and secure funding for their Non Motorized Transportation Plan. Project Specialist, JoAnn Umbrasas was very receptive to the \$3K grant request and processed it quickly through Sault Tribe Community Health. A contract was prepared and transmitted to Portage Township for consideration and signature at their April 12, 2016 Township meeting.

The deadline for submitting applications to the Graymont Community and Economic Development Fund was March 1, 2016. \_\_ applications were received and transmitted/sent to Graymont Fund Committee members for review and evaluation before their April 20, 2016 meeting to vote on grant awards.

On April 15, 2016 Dean Reid, Gary Reid, Anne and Caroline met with Andy Hayes and other members of the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance team in Pellston to talk about the challenges of securing private sector financial support in Mackinac County and

discuss specific sustainability strategies for MEA to adopt.

In August 2015 Jason Walther communicated with Mackinac County Stakeholders that Walther Farms was suspending their project in Brevort. Their inability to find a suitable rotation crop partner was the reason given for their decision. Since that time MEA has intermittently reached out to the company. In a recent conversation with Chad Cottingham he was receptive to arranging a tour of their Windsor, South Carolina potato farm. Jeremy Walthers oversees the company's SC operation and on April 6<sup>th</sup> he met up with me there for an extended tour of their 5,000-acre farm. Most revealing during the tour was the importance of rotation crop partner. Walther Farms success is predicated on selecting partners who are aligned with their values regarding people, customers, the community and the environment. They are fortunate to have such a partner (growing corn) in SC. Jeremy expressed optimism about the possibility of proceeding with the Brevort project once the correct partner was identified. Pictures of my farm tour are posted on MEA's Facebook page.

Videoconferencing equipment is in place and operating in the Commissioners Room at the Mackinac County Annex. MEA continues to work with EUP Regional Planning to furnish the Snowmobile Museum with similar videoconferencing capability. Though there is only partial funding available through Regional Planning Caroline has identified a grant opportunity for the balance of funds needed.

Gary Reid has tendered his resignation as Treasurer of MEA. He has graciously served in this position since MEA's inception in 2012. Gary has contributed an enormous amount of time and valuable expertise in guiding MEA on a sustainable path. Thankfully he will continue to serve as a member of the MEA Board.