

MACKINAC ECONOMIC ALLIANCE
Director's Report
July 11, 2016

MEA is happy to report it has launched its long awaited broadband gigabit project--- complete with title: "Bridge the Tech Divide". Find us on Facebook where access to our survey is easy, and completion of it very quick. Over the past weeks community champions in Portage, Brevort and Clark Townships have been busy distributing surveys in tax bills, business and organizational mailings and at local events. Business cards with a link to the online survey have been placed at libraries and township offices together with an informational sheet addressing frequently asked questions. MEA is tasked with the lofty goal of securing completed surveys from at least 50% of residents in the 3 pilot communities by Labor Day weekend. Mapping will be the next step in the process of evaluating the surveys. MEA is communicating with EUP Regional Planning to request their support in that effort. In addition, MEA is researching grants and identifying other means to raise funds for the necessary infrastructure each community will need to have in place for Internet service providers to take the required steps to improve broadband capacity.

MEA processed 15 applications submitted to the Graymont Community and Economic Development Fund for their 2016 round of funding. On April 20th Graymont Committee members met to review evaluations, tabulate results and vote on 2016 grant awards. Following the meeting MEA communicated in writing to all applicants and prepared a press release for area newspapers announcing the awards. Recipients included Garfield, Hendricks and Hudson Townships, the Top of the Lakes Snowmobile Museum and Engadine Consolidated Schools. On May 25th an award ceremony to celebrate 2016 grantees was held at the Snowmobile Museum in Naubinway. Representatives from Graymont, the DNR and MEA expressed their congratulations to awardees and their gratitude to the Graymont Committee. Ken Drenth was specifically recognized for his enormous assistance and expertise in launching and administering the Graymont Fund with such professionalism.

On April 25, 2016 MEA hosted an economic forum for EUP manufacturers on behalf of the Michigan Manufacturers Association. MEA was pleased to have reached out to the principals at over 35 manufacturing businesses in Mackinac, Chippewa and Luce counties to explain the purpose of the forum and invite their participation. Over 25 manufacturers and members of the EUP economic development community attended a luncheon and forum held in the Sault Smartzone. Valuable feedback was given to underscore the ongoing shortage of skilled labor and the increased need for career and vocational education programs in the EUP.

Over the past three months MEA has been working hard to inform local banks and businesses about the availability of revolving loan funds and to encourage applications. First National Bank has been very helpful in recommending prospective borrowers and supporting the development of MEA's Revolving Loan Fund Policy Guide. A final version of this Guide will be distributed to area loan officers. added to the RLF page of MEA's website and facilitate the process of evaluating loan applications for the MEA Loan Committee. At this time the Committee is considering its first application to the Fund and MEA is hopeful it will be approved and sent to USDA for their review. Several MEA Board members have been instrumental in relaying information about the RLF to prospective

business borrowers.

Pursuant to the terms of MEA's contract with Mackinac County the 2015 Statement of Financial Activity was submitted to the Mackinac County Commissioners along with a written progress report related to MEA's 2016 objectives.

In keeping with its goal to advance affordable housing development in Mackinac County MEA has taken steps to catalogue and map vacant St. Ignace motel properties suitable for redevelopment. MEA continues to be in close communication with the Woda Group and is also speaking with local developers about the many investment opportunities that exist.

On Friday June 17th Beacon Specialized Services hosted a reception to celebrate the opening of their facility in St. Ignace. Several MEA Board members attended this Open House marking the completion of Mackinac County's first brownfield redevelopment project. A second brownfield redevelopment project remains a central focus for MEA in 2016.