

For Immediate Release
September 6, 2007

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Group Looks at Regional Economic Development Approach

Carlinville, IL- Regional approaches to economic development have proven to be effective in many rural areas across the country and the four counties of Macoupin, Montgomery, Jersey, and Greene in west central Illinois are taking the initial steps to work in collaboration to find ways to stimulate economic development.

According to Macoupin County Board Chairman Andy Manar, an organizer of the regional project, the initial participation has quickly generated positive ideas between the four counties.

“If we all face the same challenges of job creation and retention, it only makes sense to start reaching out and working together toward a common solution,” said Manar. “Too often downstate Illinois and rural areas feel powerless to find ways to stimulate economic growth. By working together as a unified force, the communities and businesses located in our counties will benefit tremendously.”

Initial results have been encouraging and have led to continued discussions about further regional collaboration, according to Manar. Community leaders and interested residents discussed and prioritized regional strategies to retain and attract jobs and population last week in the four counties. The meetings facilitated by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University were held across the region in Benld, Carrolton, Jerseyville and Litchfield.

More than 120 individuals participated in the discussions. As a result, a regional steering group will form action teams to consider implementing some of the strategies prioritized by the participants.

Shari Albrecht, an account manager for Opportunity Returns, a statewide economic development program through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, said the process has been driven by the participants made up of local officials, community activists and small business owners.

“We continue to have an overwhelming response to this effort thus far and the four counties have strong potential to unite together and become a major force in economic development and job creation,” said Albrecht.

She added that the discussions at the meetings focused on job creation and retention. Infrastructure for local communities and the completion of US 67 and upgrades to major east-west corridors such as Brighton-Bunker Hill Road were prioritized. Participants also discussed marketing businesses within the four-county region, developing entrepreneurship programs for youth and retirees, leadership development for local officials, tourism and public-private partnerships.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Nora Feuquay at the Macoupin County Office of Economic Development at 217-854-7727.