

## October's Directors Report

Echo World tried to open a data center in the former Bank of America building which currently houses St. Paul's 4 Life. Echo World was unable to open as scheduled due to the regulations put in place by the Northam administration, to protect the public during the COVID pandemic. All of the incentives offered to them by the state were performance based. In short, if the hoped for jobs were not created they received zero State incentives. The IDA was able to secure a grant for Mecklenburg Electric to upgrade the Fiber Optic lines required for a data center. The only cash incentive they received was a loan from the Industrial Development Authority of Brunswick County. Like many businesses facing the additional burden of COVID 19 they were unable to open. Last week Echo World paid off the balance of the loan. Over the course of the loan ECHO World paid the IDA approximately \$8,500 in interest.

The sale of St. Paul's Farm closed on October 2, 2023. The Industrial Development Authority of Brunswick County received \$750,000 from the sale of the property. Last year the IDA harvested a tract of timber and, received \$117,300.

I attended the 2023 MD & VA Agricultural Marketing and Rural Development Conference, in Cecil County Maryland. Other than for traffic the conference was amazing as usual. This conference shows what is possible when Economic Development, IDA's, Chambers and Farmers/Businessmen work together outside of the box.

Some of the highlights from the conference include a presentation from Charlie Pendorf of the Hydro Farm – hydroponic farm specializing in herbs and microgreens also offering produce, eggs, firewood, and an emu breeding program. He spoke about and demonstrated some of the many possible ways to provide value added services.

Milburn Orchards has taken a 4 generation farm which has as greatly increased income through you pick, Agri tourism and a retail shop. They see in excess of 25,000 visitors during apple picking season. We toured Kolby Dairy farm. They have installed a methane digester which the methane is sent to a generator to produce all of the farms needs as well as enough to sell back to the utility. They also have a county wide comprehensive program which provides byproducts that are sold to Scotts Mulch as a top soil additive. Nothing is wasted. Everything on the farm is monetized.

What we heard at every farm and every networking session was that it all starts in the schools. Well organized and financed Agriculture programs from K-12 and on too community college provides student interest. These classes included animal husbandry, Controlled Environmental

Agriculture, Cut Flowers, marketing, entrepreneurial ship aqua culture and many other programs. It is critical that we provide the education and the tools required to get our children ready for a vocational technical career. It is for this reason that we applaud Dr. Midgette and the Brunswick County School Board for their support for the GO-Tech program. The County and the IDA can create jobs openings. Education can help ensure that our citizens are ready to fill them.

Most of my time is spent coordination our two active projects and well as working with 3 potential industries. I hosted one such prospect who stayed at my house. While he was here he met with funding partners, local farmers, and others who gave them a real sense of the area even to pointing out some of the issues they will face. It is my goal to make sure prospects know what they are facing. My goal is not ribbon cuttings I am interested in 5 year anniversaries. It takes too much time and effort to put a project together to not make sure that the prospect has a good chance to prosper and create sustainable jobs.

We are unable to find locations ready for occupancy by prospective businesses. I receive at least 1-2 inquires per week from people looking for a place to put their business. Simply put there are none available. I already have a Letter of Intent for the Sledge & Barkley property which will not be completed for at least 12 months. I am confident that any property ready to rent would be scooped up very quickly. If anyone is thinking about renovating their building now may very well be the time to do it. This applies to Alberta, Lawrenceville, Brodnax as well as other areas of the County.

I hosted a prospect from England. Thanks to DEQ, DHCS and VDACS for coming here last minute and staying well past normal business hours.

Applied for a DEQ grant.

I completed the last process of the IDA Strategic Plan today. I anticipate that the final report will be printed prior to the next IDA Board meeting. The plan will be sent to everyone who participated and will be available on our website and Social Media. I want to sincerely thank everyone who participated. IDA staff made every effort to have as much citizen impute as possible. The response from the community was incredible. Thanks to the local and state leaders and the state funding agencies who participated.

I most especially want to thank the IDA Board of Director and their families. Each of you volunteer your time and much time was required to make the plan yours.