**PRESS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release

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**NWILED HOSTS ANNUAL MEETING**

HANOVER, IL – Northwest Illinois Economic Development (NWILED) hosted 45 local, state, and regional organizations at their annual meeting on the evening of Wednesday, September 29, 2021, at Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa. Held in the Eagle Ballroom, the sold-out event was a celebration of NWILED’s latest achievements and offered insight on future projects and collaborations.

Presented by Jo-Carroll Energy, Jo Daviess County, and IL Bank & Trust, the event included a keynote presentation by Sylvia Garcia, Acting Director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Director Garcia brings 17 years of experience from the public and private sectors to her role as leader of the state's economic development arm. Originally from the Detroit metro area, Garcia previously served as a Principal Consultant at WSP USA. With extensive service in government - including roles at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, and as an Obama appointee at the U.S. Department of Transportation. Garcia has committed her career to developing public policy and capital programs that expand inclusive economic growth.

A Regional Leaders Panel followed the keynote that was moderated by Kimberly Ewoldsen, Director of Regional Economic Development, and the Small Business Development Center at Sauk Valley Community College. Panelists were Connie Dell, Human Resource Manager at Elkay Manufacturing in Savanna, IL, Colin Sanderson, Director of Sales and Marketing at Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa, and Diane Bausman, Executive Director of Blackhawk Waterways Convention and Visitors Bureau. Topics of conversation included COVID-19 relief programs, workforce recruitment and retention, the adaption of new technology into the workplace, supply chain management, and the growth of experience-based tourism.

The evening concluded with four awards.

1. **Business of the Year** - The first award of the night recognized the extraordinary contributions made by IL Bank & Trust to NWILED and the overall business climate in the region. Illinois Bank & Trust is a long-term supporter of NWILED both financially and timewise, with their Market President currently serving as Vice-Chair of NWILED’s Board of Directors. In the past year, IL Bank & Trust’s team worked to ensuring access to the Paycheck Protection Program for dozens of area businesses. Moreover, last fall, the bank helped start NWILED’s Genz Memorial Investment fund, the first-ever grant in our region for gap financing to help businesses and agricultural companies start, sell, and expand their enterprises.
2. **Partner of the Year** - NWILED works with dozens of partner organizations. While NWILED is privileged to work with them all, this year, one stood out. Blackhawk Hills Regional Council is a regional planning organization serving six counties in Illinois. While many organizations tightened their belts during the pandemic, they expanded, hiring three additional staff to help communities access grants and programs. Key projects over the past year and a half include air quality assessments for businesses, a greenways and trails plan for Carroll and Jo Daviess Counties, and housing studies for Carroll, Stephenson, Whiteside, and Ogle Counties They also helped numerous communities access American Rescue Plan funds and numerous businesses access the Business Interruption grants and the Back to Business grants through the State of Illinois, for which they currently serve as Community Navigators.
3. **Community of the Year** – Great work has been happening in the Village of Elizabeth. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Elizabeth was the first community in the NW IL region to step up and help their businesses with a $3,000 grant to help with rent, utilities, insurance premiums and merchandise. In addition, Elizabeth completed several investment projects, including sewer and water improvements, a new splash pad, and a new village hall next door to the village library.
4. **Board Member of the Year** – The final award of the evening recognized the contributions of a board member who went above and beyond in their service to NWILED. Amiee Martelle Schoenhaar of Riverport Railroad is a long-time investor in NWILED, and currently serves as board treasurer. She helped review applications for the Genz Memorial Investment Fund, the Jo Daviess County Revolving Loan Fun, as well as the Entrepreneurial Scholarship, all while running multiple businesses and serving on the board of directors at the Savanna Chamber of Commerce.

Of the evening’s program NWILED Board of Directors Chairman William Jahnke stated, “NWILED is so excited to host an event like this. With attendees from three states, plus Director Garcia, this is truly a culmination of our team’s hard work and dedication to serving businesses of all sizes in our region over the past year. We are honored to work with a great network of supporters, and we have such a great foundation for our current and upcoming projects to make Carroll and Jo Daviess Counties an even better place to live and work in years to come.”

Of the evening’s success, NWILED Executive Director Emily Legel stated, “We just want to thank everyone who came out tonight. I feel so lucky to have such a supportive community to celebrate, and between the upcoming housing study and worker retention projects, I think we’ll have a lot to celebrate in years to come.”

**For more information about NWILED visit nwiled.org.**