

Northwest Illinois Economic Development Creates Productive Alignments in the Communities it Serves



By Barbara Sue Grass, Program Coordinator for NWILED

Economic development organizations align themselves with a wide range of business and community partners as a way to strengthen and assist their efforts in growing the economy in the communities they serve. These partners often include local businesses, educational institutions, local, state and federal government agencies, chamber of commences, non-profit community groups, investors and regional planning bodies, among others.

Northwest Illinois Economic Development (NWILED), which serves Jo Daviess and Carroll counties, works with many of these entities to create collaborative strategies that support economic growth throughout the region.

As a non-profit organization, NWILED leverages these partnerships to attract investors, create jobs, build infrastructure and foster inclusive growth for the areas it serve. Some of NWILED key partners and business resources include:

- **UMB Bank and the Genz Small Business Development Fund Program**

Administered by UMB Bank and managed by NWILED, this program provides gap financing for small businesses to purchase physical capital, acquire an existing business or farm, or launch pilot projects. The funding does not require repayment but does have application requirements. Since its inception in 2020, more than \$100,000 has been awarded to 13 recipients.

- **Jo Daviess County Revolving Loan**

This program offers low-interest, gap financing for new or expanding businesses as part of a larger funding package. Loans typically range from \$5,000-\$100,000 at a low rate for up to 10 years. The program helps businesses secure capital for growth, job creation, and retention within the county and is administered by the county and marketed by NWILED.

- **Business Employment Skills Team (BEST, Inc.)**

NWILED works closely with BEST, a non-profit workforce agency that administers federally-funded programs designed to help adults and youth gain meaningful employment through training, job search assistance and work experience. NWILED frequently hosts BEST lunch-and-learn sessions,

helps facilitate workshops, and supports outreach efforts to employers seeking workforce training, certifications, and talent development.

- **Jo Daviess Carroll Career Technical Education Academy**

The CTE Academy is a specialized educational program that provides high school students with hands-on training, technical skills, and industry knowledge for high-wage, high-demand careers, bridging the gap between academics and employment by offering college credit, certifications, and work-based learning in a variety of fields and trades. NWILED has partnered with the CTA Academy for NWILED's annual Manufacturing & Trades Day that features site visits and career exploration and exposure involving all the high schools in Carroll and Jo Daviess counties plus Lena-Winslow in Stephenson County and typically involves over 30 businesses – large and small - and regional organizations.

- **Citizens Investment Services 401(k) Program**

NWILED has partnered with Citizens Investment Services to promote its Pooled Retirement Plan, designed specifically for very small, family-owned businesses and farms. The program offers affordable retirement investment options that help employers provide valuable benefits to their employees.

Why does an economic development organization such as NWILED align themselves with these partners? The answer extends beyond business growth alone. Holistic development plays a key role, allowing organizations to address workforce readiness, infrastructure, innovation, and community sustainability. By pooling expertise, funding, and networks, NWILED helps foster innovation, competitiveness, and long-term economic resilience that benefits the entire region.

For more information on NWILED programs and partnerships, visit www.nwiled.org or contact the office at 815-297-7261. Memberships are open to all. NWILED is located at 1 Commercial Drive, Suite 2, Hanover, Illinois, and maintains an active presence on Facebook and LinkedIn.