NW ILLINOIS
Economic Development

Northwest Illinois Economic Development Has Successful Year



By Barbara Sue Grass, Program Coordinator for NWILED

Northwest Illinois Economic Development (NWILED) closes 2026 with a strong record of economic development programs and promotions in Jo Daviess and Carroll counties. Entering its 18th year in 2027, NWILED will continue fostering business growth and helping to expand and relocate businesses in identifying their growth needs in collaboration with local government and business partners.

NWILED's 2026 highlights included its fourth annual "Build It Grow It" program in January. This entrepreneurial bootcamp offered intensive, accelerated seminars to help aspiring entrepreneurs launch businesses and established owners strengthen their knowledge and skills. Open to small business owners, managers, entrepreneurs, and high school and college students from Jo Daviess and Carroll counties and beyond, the program attracted 38 participants. Planning is underway for the 2027 program in April.

NWILED began a 12-column series for area newspapers highlighting membership benefits and the organization's roles in the communities it serves. It also produced three "Made in NW Illinois" spotlights featuring Charles Electronics, LLC in Mount Carroll, Illinois; Chadwick Manufacturing in Chadwick, Illinois; and Cotton Expressions in Warren, Illinois.

NWILED hosted two Roundtable Symposiums: one with Congressman Darin LaHood at Midwest Medical Center and another with Illinois State Senator Andrew Chesney at Lola's Deli. Sustaining members shared economic development successes and challenges with the legislators to deepen their understanding of northwest Illinois's business climate and help drive change.

In spring and summer, NWILED launched an online "Jobs Board" at www.nwiled.org. Available to all sustaining-level members, the service features job openings and internships across northwest Illinois and the tri-state area.

NWILED also launched a Job Shadow program, allowing students and career-changers to follow professionals through daily tasks and meetings and experience workplace culture. Participants can explore industries, build networks, and gain firsthand insight into specific roles. Thirteen NWILED members currently participate.

NWILED expanded its social media efforts in 2026 through contracted services from Basket Case Galena. The partnership strengthened its Facebook and LinkedIn presence and revamped and reactivated its Instagram account. Together with new, internally managed scheduled email campaigns, these efforts helped engage and retain members while reaching even a broader audience.

An AI agent was added to NWILED's website's home page to help visitors find information about economic development and other topics with their "chat" bot, thus making the site even more user-friendly.

NWILED partnered with the Jo-Carroll Career Technical Education Academy to host its sixth annual Manufacturing & Trades Day, involving 38 businesses and organizations and approximately 285 students. Since the program began in 2022 an estimated 1,500 students have benefited from the experience. Next year's date has already been set for Thursday, Oct. 14, 2027.

In November, NWILED held its first Large Building Tour, showcasing properties suited for industrial, mixed-use commercial, and/or warehousing uses. Developers, community leaders, and the public were invited to tour six selected sites, with representatives at each location providing details.

Throughout 2026, NWILED also participated in numerous community and business agendas and other activities. Details about these efforts, programs, and events are available on its website. NWILED's membership currently includes 72 organizations and continues to grow.

To learn more about Northwest Illinois Economic Development or become a member, visit www.nwiled.org or email info@nwiled.org. NWILED's office is located at 1 Commercial Drive, Suite 2, Hanover, Illinois. Call 815-297-7361 for more information.