

Will County's future 'golden'

May 3, 2008

By KAREN HANSON, sun-times news group

Interstates 80 and 355 present "golden corridors" for economic development, making Will County the premier spot for business growth in the Chicago metro area in the near future, according to John Greuling, president and CEO of the Will County Center for Economic Development.

"It is our best opportunity for the highest quality development that is going to happen in Will County for the next 50 years," Greuling told a crowd of area business people and elected officials at the CED's Eye-Opener Breakfast on Thursday in Frankfort.

Greuling pointed at several major projects already in development along the I-80 corridor, including the CenterPoint Intermodal Center in Crete and business-industrial parks in Mokena, Orland Park and Tinley Park. Other projects are in planning stages, he said.

Another 180 square miles, equivalent in size to five townships, are available throughout Will County for industrial or commercial development, Greuling said. The county is a prime location because of its transportation network and proximity to Chicago.

Will County is the 54th fastest growing county in Illinois, despite the recession and building slowdown, Greuling said. In this decade, the population has more than doubled and is expected to double again by 2020 to reach 1 million residents. New industrial space has grown by 125 percent since 2000, and the assessed value of property has risen by 550 percent since 1985.

"This is not happening anywhere else," Greuling said. "This is going to be a good place to do business."

Businesses should look at globalization as an opportunity, not a threat, he said. "We can take advantage of the new global economy," Greuling said. "We can ride that wave into a secure economic future."

But Will County's transportation system needs to be upgraded and expanded, Greuling said. He said the General Assembly must pass a \$25 billion capital bill with at least \$14 billion dedicated for roads. Most needed are additional lanes on I-80, the widening of U.S. 30 and a new interchange at Interstate 57 and Manhattan-Monee Road. Roads feeding I-355 also need improvement, and the proposed Illiana Expressway from Interstate 65 in Indiana to I-57, needs to be built, he said.

Greuling also stressed the need for the South Suburban Airport, because existing Chicago airports will reach capacity by 2025. "We must find a way to build this airport," he said.

The CED is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to recruiting, expanding and retaining businesses, creating jobs and fostering wealth. The 2008 agenda focuses on developing jobs, seeking corporate headquarters of major companies, creating a countywide blueprint for transportation needs and assisting communities with growth and planning issues.

"We are a true public-private partnership," Greuling said. "We are set up to work with public officials so that economic development can happen the way it should happen."

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