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New partnerships to power economic development in Spencer County

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SANTA CLAUS – It can be incredibly difficult to maintain or expand a business in this day and age and harder still to build one from the ground up. It's not that there aren't resources to support these ventures, and communities across the country are always eager to see new enterprises set up shop, but it can be difficult for any budding entrepreneur to navigate the web of regulations and available resources while handling all the actual meat and gristle of operating a business.

The Lincolnland Economic Development Corp. has long shouldered the burden of helping new enterprises get off the ground in Spencer County. The nonprofit organization's executive director Tom Utter, however, noted that with its office based just north of Rockport, it can be difficult for LEDC to reach out to the northern parts of the county. Fortunately, this limitation will soon become a thing of the past thanks to a new partnership between the LEDC, Spencer County Bank and a number of other area leaders in business assistance.

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PHOTO: Don Steer

Business-development leaders from near and far tour the space provided by Spencer County Bank to help promote economic development in the county. LEDC and other groups will use this space to offer entrepreneurs assistance charting a course for their future or helping them access the resources and savings opportunities available to support their ventures. Pictured clockwise from left are Robert G. Clark, Tom Utter, Paul Medcalf, Peter Tullis, Karen Koch and Jim Edwards.

Partnerships

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The Spencer County Bank's board of directors announced a new initiative Jan. 21, opening the upper floor of its Santa Claus branch for small-business development assistance. LEDC and similar organizations will be able to use this space to hold workshops, training sessions and other activities to help prospective business owners get off the ground.

Utter noted the space would be available after normal business hours, allowing aspiring entrepreneurs to schedule one-on-one sessions with trainers to help plan business strategy or explore assistance options at their own convenience.

The array of services to be made available will be considerably more diverse as well, thanks to a new partnership between LEDC and Sustainable Business Ventures of Lexington, Ky. Utter and fellow LEDC leader Jim Edwards met at the bank with SBV's founder, Robert G. Clark, and a host of other business-assistance leaders to hail a new era of cooperation in fostering economic growth in Spencer County. Joining Clark were SBV Director Paul Medcalf, Certified Public Accountant Karen Koch of Louisville, Ky. and Peter Tullis of Newburgh-based security firm Data Link of Newburgh.

All are committed to helping grow new busi-

nesses across the tri-state area and are eager to begin work with the LEDC. Clark elaborated on the mission of his non-profit firm, and how everyone assembled contributes to that overall goal. The overarching theme of SBV's efforts is to promote businesses not merely as profit-seeking ventures, but critical pillars of their local communities. This is not simply an altruistic virtue, as Clark pointed to studies showing that businesses with strong community ties tend to be more successful in the long term.

As its name implies, Sustainable Ventures also encourages up-and-coming entrepreneurs, or even private citizens inclined to business pursuits, to help plan for the long haul both in and out of their workplace. "Our goal is the sustainability of life," Clark said. "How do you help people sustain themselves in the very complicated world we live in?"

To drive this point home, he referenced the recovery of West Liberty, Ky., following a devastating 2012 tornado. Bouncing back from so much damage was by no means assured, but SBV has been spear-heading efforts to help businesses new and old lead a resurgent local economy. The reconstruction of the West Liberty Bank lies at the heart of this effort, as SBV has secured space in the structure to serve as a business-training room.

Once the bank opens over the next month,

he expects to see SBV West Liberty businesses work to rebuild a vibrant community there, and he is eager to see those same lessons applied here in Spencer County. However, SBV is not entirely new to the area.

The non-profit has also been working closely with South Shore Clean Cities through Medcalf to help promote sustainability in a more environmental sense. Medcalf has been working diligently to promote clean-air grants to help businesses and organizations transition away from diesel fuels.

A \$440,000 grant focused on public agencies recently concluded, with North Spencer School Corp. being awarded \$76,359 to help purchase a propane-powered school bus. Future rounds open to private businesses are also in the works. While environmental sustainability is not a requisite to working with SBV and LEDC in their coming collaborative effort to support local businesses, it remains an important asset. Indeed, Koch stressed that many tax deductions and funding opportunities are available for local businesses that make effort to reduce their environmental footprint.

Regardless of one's political leanings on the matter, she stressed that reduced utility costs and tax offsets provide very real and practical opportunities for local businesses to keep more money in their community.

Whether lining up would-be business leaders with funding or savings opportunities, helping them through the process of securing a loan, preparing a business plan or simply pointing someone in the right direction, LEDC and its newfound partners are eager to put the upstairs of Spencer County Bank to use. "We're here to help as a resource," said Clark. "There's a number of services out there that nobody really knows about."

Setting up the new location will take some time, but over the coming months the upper floor of the bank will eventually be stocked with computers and other equipment and staffed by an administrator ready to assist existing and prospective businesses survive and thrive in Spencer County.

In the meantime, local entrepreneurs are welcome to seek the help of the LEDC, which will continue to hold down the homefront until these new partnerships bear fruit.

Utter added that these services would be open to anyone with an eye toward starting a business, no matter how big or small their idea might be. He noted that he has often worked with college students committed to pursuing their own business ventures after graduation. One student he has been mentoring lives with autism, but has already committed to building a life for himself or herself as an entrepreneur.



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Christopher & Melanie

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A new venture in the works for Spencer County

by Kathy Tretter

Many hold dreams of becoming entrepreneurs with ideas big and small, but actual implementation can be a stopping point. How to write a business plan? How to find a property in which to conduct business and access tax advantages to help build new or retrofit something existing? Where to go for financing and how to present a plan that makes sense?

All these questions can prove daunting for someone wanting to turn their ideas to reality.

Help is on its way and, in fact, will be closer than one might imagine.

A new venture is being planned to assist with grant writing, business development and implementation,

green energy and related matters. The idea has been in the works for some time, but a location was lacking. That all changed last week and a press conference was called for the announcement.

The individuals behind the plan all have proven track records and most recently helped the North Spencer School Corporation acquire \$440,000 in grants to purchase two propane school buses.

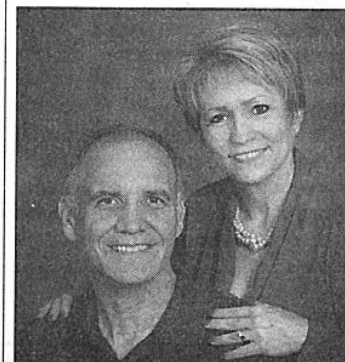
Three of the individuals will be familiar to many in the area and, with their two compatriots, met at the Spencer County Bank in Santa Claus on Friday to share their vision for something that could change the face of business in Southern Indiana. They also hope to apply sound strategies to non-profits that

often struggle with funding.

Tom Utter, executive director of Lincolnland Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), and Jim Edwards, entrepreneur extraordinaire, who has been the driving force behind several local industries and serves as the founder and president of Edwards and Associates, a management consulting firm located in Santa Claus, were joined by Paul Medcalf, with ties to Spencer County (ever hear of Medcalf Street in Dale?), Robert G. Clark, founder and president of Sustainable Business Ventures, and Karen J. Koch (pronounced *coke*), CPA, MT, founder and CEO of Karen J. Koch CPA.

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Lt. Governor Ellspermann to speak at 90th annual Lincoln Day



A new venture in the works for Spencer County

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The latter two both hail from Kentucky — Robert is from Lexington, Karen from Louisville and Medcalf lives in Evansville. Utter and Edwards both live in Santa Claus.

For some time, Edwards, an LEDC board member and nationally recognized leader in Total Quality Management/Employee Involvement (his resume of business and social achievement could fill this entire newspaper), has been working to improve the local business climate. His earlier focus after industry was on youth, serving on the Indiana Department of Education under Governor Mitch Daniels and helping both Spencer County high schools expand their technology training to meet the demands of area employers. Still, assistance for existing business owners and those interested in starting their own has been somewhat lacking.

Interested entrepreneurs can and do visit Utter at LEDC headquarters in the Lincoln Commerce Center in Rockport, but that left a void in the northern half of Spencer County.

And, for the most part, Utter

is a one man show and can be stretched very thin.

Enter Paul, Robert and Karen, all experienced in business development using a different approach with a primary focus on social enterprise and a greener environment.

Robert "Bobby" Clark, was recently instrumental in securing that \$440,000 grant for the North Spencer County School Corporation to purchase two propane buses, which will lower diesel emissions and improve local air quality.

Clark, a former publisher, founded Sustainable Business Ventures Corporation, a 501(C)3 non-profit that provides technical assistance and training for individuals wanting to start or grow a business. He initially worked with low-income college and university students, then turned his attention to former offenders who are trying to better their lives in an effort to reduce the recidivism rate. His resume would also fill this paper.

Ditto for Koch on the whole resume thing. She worked for companies both large and small and today focuses on cost segregation tax strategies — a

powerful tool to accelerate depreciation deductions that can free up valuable cash flow.

Medcalf is a director of Sustainable Business Ventures (as is Koch), and, for the past 10 years has served as president of cba inc., consulting with individuals, communities and corporations, especially assisting with development of Green Energy technologies and social entrepreneurship. He noted, "My heart is tied to Spencer County for a few reasons. My wife was Nancy Chinn whose dad was Warren, whose dad was Thomas Chinn [former mayor of Rockport]. But also, the Medcalfs moved up to Lincoln City about the same time Tom Lincoln did from around Bardstown, KY. Some Medcalfs married into the Winkler family and others into the Reinharts."

The five have been meeting and planning for some time beyond the bus grants, but as Utter points out, short of sitting in a restaurant, there is not a suitable place to go in Spencer County for such a discourse besides his office.

Enter Spencer County Bank. The financial institution has agreed to allow use of its second

story in the Santa Claus branch for a meeting space and quasi business incubator — basically a small business development center. In the coming weeks, the space will be outfitted with necessary tools (computers, printers, etc.). In addition, an administrative manager must be found, someone with a strong accounting background.

"We will also need the help of business men and women because mentor-ship is key," noted Clark.

"My goal is to grow Spencer County," interjected Edwards, adding, "We'll get infrastructure in place quickly. This is going to have a tremendous impact."

As to a future step, Koch allowed that many tax incentives can be overlooked. Accountants don't normally have an engineer in place who can help identify and maximize a building they already own. "There are lots of unique tax structures for business owners who own property," she added. Koch was quick to point out her work does not replace an existing accountant, just enhances it.

"The government fails in some ways in helping finding pathways to jobs and other

opportunities," opined Clark.

On another side of the equation, Clark puts a focus on social enterprise — a business created to further a social purpose in a financially sustainable way. This model works for non-profits in need of capital as well as business owners who want to give back. By his description, the triple bottom line looks a bit like a three legged stool (people, planet, profit) that works for both non-profit and for-profit businesses alike.

There is the social side — focused on the community and helping others.

The environmental side — what are you doing to reduce your footprint?

Then there is the bottom line — profit — a sustainability issue for churches and other non-profits as well as firms seeking to grow financially.

The trio shared a variety of success stories — from a prison program that has seen amazing results to a person with autism who first envisioned, then founded a business.

They will work one-on-one in a consulting capacity and provide references to free resources that may be available

from the state, Small Business Administration, USDA Rural Development and other entities that may be unfamiliar to someone starting out or even someone who has been in business for years.

And while the "green" component is not a requirement, it only makes sense in a day and age when grants and other assistance is available for everything from Energy Star equipment to solar panels.

The group also plans to schedule seminars and workshops, some so people can find out what is available, others as teaching tools.

Partnering with others will be a huge component, from engineers and architects to accounting firms and other business professionals working collaboratively, not competitively, towards a common goal.

"This is a partnership," concluded Edwards. "This is a dream of mine and we're now at the point to build the rest of it and apply the good old commonsense values I was taught when I was a kid. My real goal is to see all this come to light and see Spencer County grow."

Community Bulletin Board

Arts and Entertainment

A Spaghetti Dinner, hosted by the South Spencer Kiwanis Club will be held on Saturday.

Travelers to attend "A Tribute to John Denver" on April 11. This is a one-show performance. To

African-American priest leading communities whose families are mostly of European descent.

\$5 per person. Also, enjoy euchre every Tuesday at 6 p.m. Call 812-547-6261 for information.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE TO TAXPAYERS OF PROPOSED ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS
Notice is hereby given the taxpayers of Spencer County, Indiana, that the proper legal officers of the County Council at their regular meeting place at the Spencer County Courthouse, at 5 o'clock on the 16th day of February, 2016, will consider the following additional appropriations in excess of the budget for the current year.

ANNUAL APPROPRIATIONS	AMOUNT
PLAT BOOK WITH	
Account# 1181-000-4310.00	\$ 6,000.00
CREDIT	
Account# 1113-000-4010.00	\$ 2,000,000.00