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# 2018 Was Good Year For Economic Development

**By Michael Stein**

The Barnesville EDA is all about helping people succeed. And the spirit of optimism that was evident in 2017, blossomed into a great 2018.

“Looking back on 2018, we saw many goals being met that were years in the making,” said EDA Director Karen Lauer. “A lot of people contributed to the successful completion of these goals, whether it was business development or housing. It takes a lot of partners in order for projects to get started and completed.”

The EDA’s housing committee was behind the effort that led to Del Acres Gilbertson 2nd addition, which saw further growth in 2018.

“We were extremely pleased to see a number of homes built in the new addition, including spec homes,” Lauer said. “Of course the EDA was not part of the construction process, but it made the public aware of these opportunities. We have some large shovel-ready lots at very attractive prices. It’s been great to see a number of individuals and families take us up on our offer.”

Lauer added that it’s not just about houses being built.

“These efforts bring new families to the community, new children in our schools and new customers to our businesses.”

The EDA will continue to offer incentives to spark an interest with potential developers and home buyers.

“On the business side, we have some crowning achievements,” Lauer said. “The renovation of the Gunness Building for the new home of Stoneridge Software was certainly the biggest.”

The EDA acquired the building some years ago and had several parties interested in the historic 120-year-old structure.

“We shared our vision about the building’s possible rehabilitation to a lot of people,” Lauer said. “But most faced a significant challenge with the amount of work and dollars involved.”

Lauer said the EDA has supported Stoneridge from its humble beginnings to the present day, as the company continues to grow.

“Stoneridge had outgrown its office space in the old City Hall,” Lauer said. “Eric Newell was interested in Gunness Building’s



A modern conference room is part of the new Stoneridge Software’s world headquarters in the Gunness Building on Front Street.



Renee’s Drive-in closed in 2018, but re-opened shortly after under new ownership as Dee’s Drive-in. Local folks and travelers can still enjoy a well-established tradition on Highway 34 near the interstate.

historic value and having it rehabbed as it was constructed in 1899.”

The effort took several partners and coordination among every entity involved to identify the developer, and find funding sources.

“That project was the most visible,” Lauer said. “Still, the EDA is continually concerned about vacant buildings downtown. “We work with the Main Street Program to get the word out about opportunities to start businesses in those buildings. It also takes a partnership with the property owners to make that happen.”

Such partnerships helped bring businesses such as Front Street Nutrition and 2nd Time’s a Charm to downtown in 2018.

“We also measure our economic success by the ability of businesses to change hands and remain open,” Lauer said. “What can sometimes happen is the owners go out of business and the doors close for good.”

In 2018, Renee’s Drive-in closed, but it re-opened under new ownership as Dee’s Drive-in. The Purple Goose was sold and remains a viable Front Street business. Previous examples include the Eagle Cafe, and Barnesville Drug and Hardware.

“We never want to underestimate our partners,” Lauer said. “Certainly from a financing standpoint, the EDA provides some forms of loans, but Midwest Bank is very open to work with a lot of individuals looking to start a business or continue a business here.”

The Small Cities Grant from the State of Minnesota led to many improvements among local businesses.

“Some are invisible improvements like roofing, electrical work and plumbing,” Lauer said. “The grant is nearing an end and the work being done will be completed by the end of September. We do expect to see some visible changes result from the grant, like storefront improvements.”

Lauer stressed the importance of volunteers in all the EDA’s efforts. She said the EDA Board has been very active, with the housing and business committee putting in a lot of time over the past year to get current projects moved forward.

“Economic development projects are often long-term by nature,” Lauer said. “Each year we’re working hard to plant the seeds for future development. Last year the board was thrilled to assist in the sale of the Buth property west of Dollar

General to the Martinez family to start a vineyard this year.”

At its annual meeting in January 2019, the EDA Board’s chair position was turned over to Ryan Tonsfeldt after Eric Spilde’s term ended.

“It’s those volunteers who continually work to keep our vision alive,” Lauer said. “That can be challenging because it truly is a marathon. But it’s great when you finally reach the finish line.”

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