

INTERSECT

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There are six clusters: manufacturing, electric vehicles, technology, agribusinesses, life sciences, and logistics.

Southwestern Illinois is particularly strong in logistics and manufacturing, he said.

The campaign, which is mainly conducted outside the state, is “getting a great reaction from consultants who can help us in the recruitment as well as from interested businesses,” he said.

During the recent tour, consultants were able to see highlights, courtesy of executives from Intersect Illinois and, among others, Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois, an organization that advocates on behalf of issues affecting economic development.

The consultants were from California, South Carolina and Texas.

Stephan, who is the vice president of Downstate Relations for Intersect Illinois, said there are two ways to get eyes on the Land of Lincoln.

“One is, we can take our case to the decision makers. The other way is to bring the decision makers to Illinois,” Stephan said.

The tour’s stops included the Boeing project at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport

in Mascoutah; the logistics valley in Edwardsville and Pontoon Beach; and the heavy industrial corridor along Illinois Route 3 in and outside of Granite City.

The director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, with which Intersect works closely, was present at one of the stops, at America’s Central Port in Granite City. It was a large group of community leaders.

“We also had business represented there,” Seals said. “It’s important for site selection consultants to hear directly from local business.” Among those who spoke was a Boeing executive. Such conversations are often “unfiltered” and “go a long way” toward an accurate picture of the business environment.

The site tour started on a Sunday and ended on a Tuesday morning. Consultants have said they would share the details through their networks.

“This is about bringing business to Southwestern Illinois. I’m hoping the consultants, and the folks who read their summaries, will give us looks at projects we can compete for,” Seals said.

There are thousands of companies that can be recruited, and the trick is to have as much knowledge in hand as

possible while making the overtures.

“There is some art, and some science to it,” Seals said. One asset he cited was Intersect’s research team. Members will look at a particular recruitment sector and identify the top companies in it. Software helps them see which companies are looking to move or expand.

“Then, we market to them,” Seals said. “We will call them directly, we’ll email them directly. We’ll post ads that they will see — all inviting them to learn more about Illinois.”

Some of the challenge, of course, is perspective. Illinois often gets maligned as a bad place for business because of taxes, bureaucracy and politics.

“That’s a big issue for me. One of our biggest challenges is our perception of ourselves. You don’t get the fifth-largest economy in the country — the 18th largest on the planet — by being a bad place to do business.”

There are 36 Fortune 500 companies based in Illinois, he said.

“Getting people to understand that our assets far outweigh our liabilities is a big piece of getting ambassadors for this state,” Seals said.

People need to better appreciate the

fact that Illinois has a central location, a skilled workforce, and “fantastic” infrastructure. The state is the only one where all seven Class I railroads pass through.

“By the way, six of those Class I railroads meet in Southwestern Illinois. That is a fantastic asset that we have.”

Forty-three percent of Illinoisans have a bachelor’s degree or better, he said.

“University of Illinois alone graduates more engineers than Caltech, Stanford and MIT combined, every single year,” Seals said.

The campaign launched in early April. He said it will be some time before any successes connected to it are realized.

“This is a long cycle business. Most projects take six to 18 months to come fruition. I’m hopeful that as we get into late this year or early next that we’ll see some of the fruits of these efforts.”

He said the agency has “projects in the pipeline for Downstate Illinois that we’re hoping to announce in the coming months.”

Nondisclosure agreements prohibit him from getting in to many details, but prospects fall into the manufacturing sector.

ENGINEER

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Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 150,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America’s oldest national engineering society.

The ASCE is active in lobbying efforts before Congress. It produces an Infrastructure Report Card every four years. The Society had a strong voice in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by Congress this year.

“Some 48 of our recommendations were almost verbatim in the law,” said Geldert-Murphey, who earned her Bachelor of Science in civil engineering at South Dakota State University. She earned her Master of Science in geotechnical civil engineering at University of Missouri Science and Technology.

The Illinois Department of Transportation interviewed her for potential employment while she was still a student in South Dakota.

“Back in the day, IDOT had a really good rotation program where you served a certain period of time in each of the departments. I started out in construction, on the biggest construction project in the state at the time, with the Clark Bridge (in Alton),” she said. Her next rotation took her to design

She spent eight years at IDOT, from 1992 to 2000. While there she earned her master’s degree in geotechnical engineering at University of Missouri at Rolla.

In 2000 she went to SCI Engineering, her first role in a consulting firm, specializing in geotechnical engineering. There, she made partner.

In 2006, she and Geri Boyer partnered to form Kaskaskia Engineering Group. Geldert-Murphey was there until 2012 when she sold her portion of the business to her partner.

She is originally from South Dakota, and her parents had taken sick, forcing her to travel back and forth to the state. She took a year away from the profession and during that time became more active with ASCE.

In 2013, she started another company, Sequoia Engineering and Environmental, in St. Louis. It was during that working period that the freak incident with the elevator changed her life.

It occurred March 17, 2016. She was in Washington, D.C., advocating on behalf of ASCE on Capitol Hill. She’d gone back to her hotel to hook up her computer, left her room and entered the upper floor elevator. What happened next remains a blur to this day. Some-

thing happened on the way down.

“The elevator doors opened on the ground floor, and I was incapacitated. I had a head injury, a back injury — and they don’t really know what happened. It’s never been explained.”

She suffered a skull fracture and was in a coma for eight days. She has no memory of the events.

She hired attorneys to look into the incident, but the findings were inconclusive.

“They couldn’t find anything that showed the elevator malfunctioned. It didn’t appear that I was attacked. So, they don’t really know what happened. The orthopedic surgeon who basically put my spine back together said the injuries were consistent with those he had seen in car accidents,” she said.

Brain trauma left her having to learn to walk and talk all over again. The physical therapy continued for the next year. Then followed seven surgeries on her spine.

At the time of the elevator incident, Geldert-Murphey had already sold Sequoia Engineering to another local firm, Gonzalez Companies. Part of the acquisition involved her establishing two new lines of business, Geotech and NEPA Services, which she did. Afterward, she had a year during which she again had a noncompete

involving a restricted geographic area. She had to leave the roadway industry.

She went to work as chief operating officer for Jim Taylor Roofing. It was a totally different industry than she’d been accustomed.

“Lochmueller called me (about going to work) literally a week before my noncompete expired,” she said. She hadn’t been tracking the date, but Lochmueller was aware of it. Initially she turned them down, then reconsidered, after executive changes were underway at Taylor.

That was 2018; she remains at Lochmueller today.

Lochmueller is a Midwest company headquartered in Indiana. Geldert-Murphey is in charge of its Illinois and Missouri operations. She has a desk in both the St. Louis and Troy, Ill., offices.

“I’ve always been blessed. I’ve always been able to land on my feet,” she said.

She’s written three books on her many life experiences. One is called, “Cross, Yield or Burn – Navigating the Bridges of Life.” It encompassed the ups and downs of the years when she faced the strain of both her parents’ deaths in 2011 and the fact that she had small children at home, while running a business.

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