**SW Partners Restarts Economic Development**

*Mike Breininger, Southwest Partners Executive Team*

After an absence of an Economic Development Organization (EDO) in Richland County since January 2014, Southwest Partners, a community building citizen group, has taken on the challenge of restarting an EDO in the region. SW Partners has created the Career Education Cooperative, the Pine Rive Trails and Silent Sports, and the Safe Routes efforts over the past three years. The successes of these efforts have encouraged SW Partners to find additional partners inside Richland County and outside the County so economic development can take a front and center role again.

SW Partners is partnering with the Southwest Regional Planning Commission, Prosperity Southwest, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board as regional partners. Local partners contributing financially to the effort in order to hire an economic development specialist include; *Richland County, Richland Center Utilities, Richland Electric Cooperative, Prosperity Southwest, and SW Partners*. SW Partners is also seeking to be on the agenda for the City of Richland Center to give the City an opportunity to financially partner for this important effort. A number of local partners are also joining in the organizing efforts including; The Richland Hospital, UW-Richland, Wallace, Cooper, and Elliott Insurance Agency, Community First Bank, and many talented and passionate individuals. The economic development (ED) group expects to have a new economic development specialist working in Richland County in June 2017.

SW Partners has broken down Economic Development in to three primary focuses; traditional **economic development**, including attraction of new businesses, entrepreneurial start-up assistance, workforce development, capital investment, expansion of existing businesses, housing, and marketing. The second focus is **social attraction** which includes; life enhancement such as recreation, entertainment, specialized restaurants, social spaces, community branding, and social media. Finally, the development of a **community foundation** that will support business establishment, growth, and expansion. All three of these focus areas will be moving ahead simultaneously with a goal of being functional in 2017.

In the past 10 years communities near Richland County have outpaced the County and the City of Richland Center in population growth and economic growth. Boscobel, Viroqua, Spring Green, and Reedsburg have all carried out robust economic development efforts that have paid off with increased growth and wealth creation. Now, Richland County and communities just outside the county will work to catch up and become outstanding in the region.

Community growth and economic development is an exciting new effort for our area and offers the potential of a cultural shift toward optimism, opportunity, and prosperity. Since SW Partners is a citizen based effort, people in the community are encouraged to join this effort and become a part of the changing tide that will make our area an outstanding place to live and grow for individuals and families. Checkout the SW Partners website at southwestpartners.org, or email us at swpartners15@gmail.com or contact an executive team member, Mike Breininger, mikeb@mwt.net, Dale Bender, dbender@wppienergy.org, Mick Cosgrove, mcosgrove57@gmail.com, Larry Engel, engel.larry1@gmail.com, Becky Dahl, k2p2\_becky@me.com, or Kevin Hauser, krhauser@wccucreditunion.coop, to join this culture changing community effort.