

Address to the membership
Fairfield Economic Development Association Annual Meeting
September 22, 2009
Brent M. Willett, Executive Director

In 2009, The Fairfield Economic Development Association celebrated its thirty-first year of leadership in the Fairfield area. I choose the word “leadership” in lieu of words like or “community advocacy” or even “economic development” because after we peel the proverbial onion, leadership is at core of what we do and what we’ve done. From working with others on large scale development projects like Southgate to entrepreneurial assistance like the ten jobs we helped create with Let’s Order Online this year, it has been the steady leadership exemplified by this fine organization which has persistently contributed to the furtherance of our community since FEDA was founded in 1978.

Page nine of our 2009 annual report begins with a section listing the FEDA Board of Directors. The section is titled “leadership”. That is no mistake or coincidence. The individuals listed there are at the very core of what we do. Pat Doyle, Craig Foss, Frank Fritz, Jodi Kerr, Dave Reiff, Lori schaefer, Dan Sullivan, Jane Anne Harl, Ed Malloy, and John Morrissey: most of you are here tonight and you deserve recognition and thanks for the time and the talent you contribute to our mission. I’d also like to thank Samuel Busch, FEDA administrator, for his fine work in 2009.

We in the field of economic development are given perhaps the simplest charge of all: wealth and jobs. Create them. Hold them. Repeat.

Simple though the charge may be, it is also one of society’s most challenging and, at times, most divisive and heated. Fortunately, we at the Fairfield Economic Development Association are gluttons for punishment.

In 2009, FEDA successfully implemented the second and final phase of our two-year business plan, as well as the first phase of our 2011 strategic plan, released in the spring.

The implementation of the 2011 plan corresponded with the completion of the Fairfield existing business initiative, a local business outreach program which saw FEDA representatives survey and visit with more than forty of Fairfield’s largest employers. The results of the initiative were reported upon in a report to the community released in February and available here tonight.

The report, among many other things, found that Fairfield businesses plan to expand by a figure of more than two to one over the next 36 months, an estimated capital investment of more than \$77 million and 361 new jobs. The initiative’s finding were drawn upon heavily and put to work during the drafting of the 2011 Strategic Plan.

FEDA too in 2009 released the first web site dedicated to economic development in the Fairfield area's history with GrowFairfield.com.

FEDA also added, by way of its 2011 Strategic Plan, a sophisticated issue-based advocacy capacity to its capabilities in 2009. FEDA maintains a strong presence on the new Chamber Legislative Affairs Committee and is represented on several state- and national- level advocacy organizations.

Beyond major and more visible projects, 2009 was a year of steadfast progress and accomplishment for FEDA. From infrastructure projects to educational offerings to new business development, FEDA delivered on its wealth and jobs promise. I invite you to review our annual report for details of much of what we were able to accomplish through the support of members like you in 2009.

This year we welcomed new FEDA board members Jodi Kerr of TD&T Financial Group and Dan Sullivan of Cambridge Investment Research, two talented, skillful businesspeople who make tremendous additions to your organization. Let's thank them for their commitment.

Like most industries, that of economic development is commanded by the "What have you done for me lately?" query. And so, 2009, by the numbers, included: more than \$700,000 in financial incentives received by local businesses through direct FEDA project involvement. 79 new jobs those incentives guarantee. And \$3.4 million those incentives leverage in capital investment in our community. Despite a tremendously troubled global, national and state-level economic environment, Fairfield held its own and found pockets of growth and success in 2009. You'll learn more about some of those success stories in our 2009 Annual Report.

The challenging environment to which I refer is one which moved Jefferson County's unemployment rate near nine percent this year. It is one which forced many businesses to introduce extremely painful workforce adjustments and brought many others perilously close to even more substantial changes. And it is one which continues to affect components of the Fairfield- area economy, particularly in the areas of durable goods manufacturing and services.

But we have emerged, on balance, robustly. A diverse economy had one of its finest hours in 2009 and has us positioned for growth in the near term. Manufacturing capacities are on the rise, in tandem with order flow. Start-up and early level companies have loaded up on talent made available by the downturn. Players in traditionally coastal markets like finance, information technology, even social media consulting, are growing and thriving right here in the Fairfield area. And a new plan placing us on the path to economic and social sustainability debuts in Fairfield in 2009 which has the potential to remake the way we grow as a community by way of smarter, leaner and more sustainable business practices.

In 2010, FEDA will address the issue upon which virtually every concern and anxiety expressed by those we talked to during the existing business initiative rests: workforce- both its availability

and its quality. FEDA will in 2010 work with school districts around the region as well as Indian Hills Community College to work toward a regional workforce preparedness center for high school students, a "Career Academy". We will act upon the responsibilities we've accepted from Mayor Malloy's sustainability commission. We will again expand our marketing menu to include social media and more robust commercial real estate platform. We will thrust ourselves into the downtown conversation- working with groups and the city to develop strategies and programs to improve the attractiveness of downtown buildings. We will work with other community groups and political leadership to address the tremendously perilous situation the fine center in which we sit tonight finds itself- a circumstance which, regardless of cause, if left unaddressed, will contribute difficulty to the business and community development efforts we all work toward. And that is an understatement to say the least. And we will continue our work with existing industry to help motivate expansions and our work marketing Fairfield to outside employers.

2009 was another year of transformation for the Fairfield Economic Development Association and I expect 2010 to be another year of substantial debate, progress and innovation. We thank you for your support of FEDA through your membership in this organization and the contribution of your time and talent to our processes.

Thank you for coming this evening and thank you for your continued investment in Fairfield.