

# New Marshall County EDC pushing for diversification of local industry base

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The overarching goal of the Marshall County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) is to create an economic development agency that assists the entire county in building an economy that is robust, growth-oriented and produces prosperity.

During the last year, the MCEDC has made significant strides toward this end.

While promoting the county as an excellent place to locate new companies and expand existing ones, we have made great progress in solidifying the office as a focal point for economic development activity in the county.

We are in the process of moving into our new office at 2864 Miller Drive, near the intersection of U.S. 30 West at Pioneer (Pine) Road. The office should be fully functional by April. The office is easily accessible from U.S. 30. It will be equipped with the latest presentation resources and provide an excellent venue from which to highlight the economic attributes of Marshall County and its constituent communities.

Our new Web site, [www.marshallcountyedc.org](http://www.marshallcountyedc.org), is also up and running. This is arguably the single most important marketing tool in economic development. Its design was based on the comparative advantages research

conducted by Purdue and Indiana Universities and the International Economic Development Council. It

showcases the county's advantages to site consultants, corporate real estate personnel and local companies.

## Expansion projects

The Marshall County Economic Development Corporation has participated in several expansion projects, some of which have come to fruition and others that should culminate in the first half of this year.

We are also involved with three new investment projects, one of which we expect to materialize in the first quarter of this year.

Even so, Marshall County has not been spared by recent macroeconomic events which have left us with an unacceptably high unemployment rate of 10-12 percent, the fifth highest in the state. Usually one of our economic strengths, manufacturing in general and transportation-related manufacturing in particular, have become something of an Achilles heel for the national economy.

Our county is highly reliant on manufacturing, a sector which has been in decline in the United States for at least the last 20 years. To exacerbate



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this situation, we have a high density of transportation equipment and other automobile-related manufacturers in this and neighboring counties. The latter sector has been especially hard hit by recent economic events.

Another reality of our global economy is that economics is no longer (if it ever really was) a respecter of political boundaries. When more people in China and India purchase and use automobiles, fuel prices go up in Marshall County and everywhere else.

Closer to home, when unemployment in surrounding counties increases, it impacts Marshall County because we have a considerable number of residents who work in surrounding counties.

This brings us to our northeastern neighbor, Elkhart County, where over 2,000 Marshall County residents were employed.

At a staggering 15.3 percent, Elkhart County is experiencing the highest unemployment in the state. Given our close proximity, it is difficult to imagine that this has not negatively impacted Marshall



County. In short, both Marshall County and its neighbors may well be too reliant on niche manufacturing.

## Diversification is key

In order to avoid or at least mitigate the negative effects of too much reliance on a single economic sector, MCEDC is working to help diversify our economic base.

Certainly we want to continue to encourage transportation equipment and automobile-related manufacturers to invest in Marshall County, but we also want much more agribusiness, chemicals and chemical-based products,

transportation and logistics and other industry sectors that have comparative advantages in the county.

We also, need to continue to create the infrastructure required to transition from a primarily manufacturing-focused economy to the knowledge-based economy of the future. This is just one of the very important areas in which the Marshall County Economic Development Corporation is diligently working.

*Tom Turner is executive director of the Marshall County Economic Development Corporation.*