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Leaders optimistic about state of DeKalb County

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DeKALB – Paul Borek called 2010 an “extraordinary year” for DeKalb County.

Borek, executive director of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp., highlighted business developments and expansions in all of the communities in the county during Tuesday’s 2011 State of the County update at DCEDC’s annual dinner.

The 2011 officers and directors of DCEDC also were announced during the meeting.

Don Bricker, publisher of the Daily Chronicle, is taking over as the president of the DCEDC board of directors; former President Gary Evans’ term ended this year. Bricker formerly served as the secretary and treasurer of the group. Paul Callighan, who works for ComEd, is now vice president of development, and Greg Millburg, DeKalb County Farm Bureau manager, is the secretary and treasurer for the group.

About 250 people attended this year’s meeting, where they heard about development projects that have taken place in the county within the last year. Borek said 28 percent of all metro Chicago industrial construction happened in DeKalb County in 2010.

“That’s a significant achievement and accomplishment,” Borek said.

Other notable accomplishments in DeKalb County last year included the Chicago Chapter of the National Association of Industrial and Office Parks recognizing the 3M Regional Distribution Center in Park 88 as the industrial build-to-suit project of the year. Borek said 3M is currently working on its fifth expansion in the DeKalb area.

Borek also said the only manufacturing buildings that were constructed in the metro Chicago area in 2010 were built in

the Sycamore Prairie Business Park. Those buildings were constructed for SK Hand Tools and Smart Motion Robotics.

Borek credited the developers Venture One and Clayco Realty Group for much of the county’s economic success in 2010, but he said communities also have been proactive about economic growth and development.

“The city of DeKalb and the city of Sycamore together with all of the area taxing bodies embraced these individual development projects with prudent incentives and expedited development timetables,” Borek said.

He said DeKalb County communities are welcoming, property is affordable, the area has world-class educational institutions, the area’s fiber-optics telecommunication project is state of the art and the county has an excellent transportation network, which all contribute to the county’s growth.

Evans, who just finished his two-year term as president of the DCEDC board of directors, said he’s seen a lot of great things happen in the county in the last few years despite stressful economic times.

“When you take all of the cities and pieces in the county and put them all together, actually it’s overwhelming to see all the businesses and potential businesses that have come here that a few years ago were just dreams,” Evans said.

Glen Lee, director of Wendler Engineering Services in DeKalb, said he heard more optimism compared to last year.

“We may be bouncing off the bottom,” he said.

Borek also shared findings from DCEDC’s business retention visitation program, which surveyed 25 small businesses in the county. He said 40 percent of business owners said their biggest accomplishment in the last year was growing their business, while 36 percent said surviving the past year was their biggest accomplishment. Borek said 68 percent of small businesses looked forward to offering new products and services.

“All in all, it was a productive year,” he said.