

AGTECH CONNECT AND BIOMANUFACTURING

AgTech Connect returned in February with a session at the USDA National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research (NCAU) in Peoria, continuing a quarterly series that connects research, industry, and real-world application to strengthen the region's ag-innovation economy. In March, GPEDC represented Greater Peoria at the iFAB Tech Hub Biomanufacturing Summit hosted as part of AgTech Week in Champaign. The event drew more than 400 attendees, including major biomanufacturing companies, supply chain partners, workforce development organizations, and government leaders, and provided valuable relationship-building opportunities to support Greater Peoria's growing fermentation and industrial biomanufacturing base. The quarter's AgTech highlight came at the 11th Annual AgTech Summit at the University of Illinois Research Park, where two founders from the Distillery Labs community were named finalists in the Startup World Cup competition. The summit had a record attendance year, with more than 350 participants. This result reflects GPEDC's intentional work to connect Greater Peoria's founder community with key innovation networks, including the Center for Digital Agriculture.



BUSINESS RETENTION IN ACTION: HEARTLAND FOOD SOLUTIONS

A \$1 million state grant to the Village of Deer Creek to help with the expansion of Heartland Food Solutions made news at the end of 2025 and into the first quarter of 2026, but the real story is the years of relationship-building that led to it. GPEDC's Sally Hanley developed an ongoing connection with the company, consistently engaging with leadership on their needs and growth opportunities. She assembled and submitted the grant on behalf of the Village of Deer Creek, resulting in an award that will help Heartland expand its offerings and create or retain 40 jobs. This is business retention at its best: sustained, strategic, and impactful.

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ALIGNING MEDIA AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

In February, GPEDC convened regional partners and local journalists, including representatives from WEEK News and 25 News, to strengthen the way economic development stories are communicated across Greater Peoria. The session created clearer pathways for media outlets to access timely information, trusted data, and relevant story leads. The result is stronger regional coordination, a more unified voice, and new partnership opportunities connecting innovation, entrepreneurship, and media visibility.



GPEDC TEAM PARTICIPATES IN COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS WEEK

This March, GPEDC team members volunteered at Neighborhood House of Peoria during Community Champions Week (March 23–27), packing meals for homebound seniors. Neighborhood House delivers meals and meaningful human contact daily to seniors who might otherwise go without both, carrying forward a mission rooted in the 1972 federal nutrition program that became the Meals on Wheels network. This participation reflects a core belief at GPEDC: true economic development means building a community where residents of all ages can thrive.



BIG TABLE GREATER PEORIA: SERIES CONCLUDES

The Big Table Greater Peoria series reached its conclusion this quarter with the Logan County Rural Big Table, held in February at the Lincoln Park District offices in Lincoln. The event drew strong participation, including approximately a dozen walk-in attendees, and generated candid conversation about the region's future. GPEDC is grateful to partners at the Lincoln Park District, Lincoln Economic Advancement and Development (LEAD), the City of Lincoln, and Mayor Tracy Welch for their collaboration. With events now complete across Peoria, Woodford, Mason, and Logan Counties, preliminary findings have been released. Consistent themes across urban and rural sessions include transportation access, childcare availability, workforce readiness, and entrepreneurship support. Rural communities added concerns about disappearing services and the persistent feeling of being overlooked. These findings form the foundation of the next Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS 2026–2030), and committees are already at work translating community input into regional action.



ENERCON ACQUISITION SIGNALS STRENGTH IN ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Enercon, a member of the Greater Peoria Manufacturing Network and a leader in advanced power systems for more than 50 years, was acquired by Generac in February. Based in East Peoria and employing approximately 150 people, Enercon serves critical sectors including data centers and national defense. The acquisition marks an exciting new chapter for the company and reinforces the depth of manufacturing expertise that defines the Greater Peoria region.

FOREIGN-TRADE ZONE #114: 40 YEARS OF REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

GPEDC administers Foreign-Trade Zone #114, a powerful tool that helps regional manufacturers and logistics firms compete globally by reducing duties, lowering costs, and improving supply-chain efficiency. Serving a 24-county region in Central Illinois, FTZ #114 marked its 40th anniversary this year, a milestone that reflects decades of consistent value delivered to businesses across Greater Peoria. To make FTZ benefits more accessible, GPEDC finalized a refreshed marketing one-pager and completed a new animated explainer video in partnership with McDaniels Marketing. These tools translate a complex federal program into clear, actionable information for companies and site selectors evaluating Greater Peoria for investment.