



2024
**ANNUAL
REPORT**

OPENING LETTER FROM CEO

Annual reports are always a challenge to put together. How do you package the incredibly hard work of ten professionals, a Board of Directors, volunteer committee members and a host of local partners into just a few pages of highlights? For every success story we put in the spotlight, there is one we had to leave out. But no one will read a thirty page document!

It is my pleasure to again share with you some highlights from the great work that the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council accomplished over the past year. Because of your investment in us, we had an amazing year. We helped businesses access millions of dollars in grants; co-hosted the largest ever Career Spark; launched a new Talent Concierge program; completed rural broadband studies; built partnerships across the state and nation; welcomed new friends from Brazil to Peoria and then returned the favor and visited them; and hosted our first ever Economic Development Forum. We expanded our team and welcomed four new members. And we even moved into a brand new home that we had a big role in building – Distillery Labs.

None of this happens without you. If you are reading this Annual Report, chances are you helped make these successes possible. If you are a member of our Board of Directors, thank you for your guidance and support. If you are one of our great partners, thank you for working alongside our team to make success a reality. And if you are an investor, thank you for recognizing the importance of this organization and its ability to serve Greater Peoria. I am lucky to lead such an incredible team in such an incredible region. Here's to 2025!



Best Regards

Christopher Setti

ABOUT US

The Greater Peoria Economic Development Council (GPEDC) is a regional economic development organization serving five counties in Central Illinois: Peoria, Tazewell, Woodford, Mason and Logan. GPEDC is both planner and practitioner. We help grow the regional economy by marketing Greater Peoria's assets to businesses across the nation and world; supporting local companies in their growth through a variety of programs; developing initiatives that create a more robust workforce pipeline; helping to create a robust startup ecosystem; and ensuring that our rural communities are connected to economic opportunities. Guided by our nationally recognized comprehensive economic development strategy, GPEDC is committed to advancing the region's economy by supporting business and talent development and attraction.

OUR MISSION

The Greater Peoria Economic Development Council serves as a catalyst for economic development and opportunity by attracting, developing, assisting, and retaining a diversified mix of businesses and investing in community needs that foster balanced economic growth.





2024 HIGHLIGHTS

\$7M+
GRANT WRITING
ASSISTANCE FOR RURAL
PROJECTS

150+
BUSINESS VISITS

64
SITE SELECTOR
REQUESTS PROCESSED

150+
BUSINESSES SUPPORTED
TO ACCESS GRANTS
THROUGH THE
COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR
PROGRAM

11K+
CAREERSPARK
STUDENTS

75+
SCHOOLS REPRESENTED
AT CAREERSPARK

10K+
FOLLOWERS GAINED
ORGANICALLY ACROSS
SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

\$20M+
TOTAL EDA INVESTMENT IN
LAST FOUR YEARS

660K
IN B2B GRANTS SECURED

TOGETHER, WE MAXIMIZE OUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS.

Greater Peoria EDC and its partners work collectively to develop and implement economic development strategies that would be difficult to do individually. GPEDC works successfully across multiple political boundaries, between rural and urban communities, among our numerous industry sectors, and in collaboration with partner organizations at the local, state, federal and international levels. GPEDC pools and leverages limited resources to ensure the broader region is appropriately served. Together, we are more effective at sharing our story, taking advantage of opportunities and voicing issues of a collective concern. Together, we maximize our chances of success.



PROGRAMS

BUSINESS ATTRACTION

We strategically position and market Greater Peoria to the rest of the world as a great place for business investment.

64

RFIS PROCESSED

20

VISITS FROM FOREIGN COMPANIES

Highlights

Strengthening Ties with Brazil: A Two-Way Exchange

Greater Peoria continued to build upon its successful relationship with Brazil through a dynamic, two-way exchange of ideas and opportunities. In mid-2024, we hosted a delegation of 33 Brazilian entrepreneurs, business leaders, and academics participating in the “Brazilian Tech Connections” program. Their two-and-a-half-day visit included discussions on agriculture at Stewart Family Farms, a tour of the AgLab and Distillery Labs, and lively networking sessions with local startups and advisors. This initial visit showcased our region’s agriculture, manufacturing, and innovation expertise, generating enthusiasm and forging new connections.

Later in the year, the collaboration went global when Chris Setti and Distillery Labs’ Doug Cruitt traveled to Brazil. Over the course of five intensive working days—encompassing visits to Florianópolis, Porto Alegre, Cuiabá, and São Paulo—the team reconnected with previous delegates and formed new partnerships with local innovation hubs. They delivered targeted pitches to startups interested in U.S. expansion, highlighting the supportive ecosystem and strategic advantages of Greater Peoria. The success of these in-person exchanges underscores the mutual interest in continued partnership and foreign direct investment. By strengthening ties with Brazil, we also expand our region’s visibility and spark valuable cross-cultural connections that drive economic growth and innovation.



Chris Setti and Doug Cruitt with founders in Brazil

Germans in Peoria

Greater Peoria continues to welcome international visitors, forging meaningful connections to strengthen our regional economy. Over the past year, we have hosted multiple groups, including two delegations from Brazil and visits from the consul generals of Mexico, Canada, Qatar and Australia. In October, eight German startups specializing in smart cities and sustainable mobility technologies explored opportunities in our region. Working closely with the German American Chamber of Commerce in Chicago, we arranged a “pitch” session for these visiting entrepreneurs. The attendees—local government staff, civil engineers, transportation experts, and other interested parties—learned about innovative solutions in urban planning and sustainable transport. Our international guests expressed genuine appreciation for our region’s hospitality and the vibrancy of Greater Peoria’s startup ecosystem. Introducing Peoria to those who might not otherwise discover it is one of the most rewarding parts of our work.



German startups during a tour of Distillery Labs

QUICK HITS

- With a Local Technical Assistance grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, GPEDC partnered with Newmark to pinpoint three growth industries—food production, manufacturing process/logistics, and industrial toolmaking—and outline 30 strategic recommendations.
- Received and analyzed 64 site selector Requests for Information from Intersect Illinois.
- Submitted viable sites to 17 of those requests, resulting in one site visit to date.
- Built relationships with site selectors by attending three different conferences.
- Helped Pekin and Peoria receive “vetted sites” designation from Intersect Illinois, recognizing top-tier development locations based on eight key site characteristics.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

Greater Peoria EDC 2024 Annual Report

We help our existing industries and businesses flourish and grow through consistent outreach, targeted programming and resource referrals.

Highlights

150+ BUSINESS VISITS
660K IN B2B GRANTS SECURED

Strengthening Our Manufacturing Culture: ILDMC Quarterly Meeting

As a founding Illinois Defense Manufacturing Consortium (ILDMC) member, GPEDC continues to strengthen our national defense network by uniting manufacturing expertise. We hosted ILDMC's quarterly meeting at Illinois Central College, welcoming representatives from the University of Illinois Chicago, IMEC, the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce, M3 Chicago, and the Rockford Area EDC. Participants toured ICC's manufacturing training center and shared updates on their respective initiatives, reinforcing the region's dedication to supporting and enhancing defense-related manufacturing capabilities.



Sally and Dick at Defense Industry Day



Tour of ICC manufacturing training center during ILDMC Quarterly meeting

Showcasing Greater Peoria at Defense Manufacturing Industry Day

In August GPEDC joined the inaugural Illinois Defense Manufacturing Industry Day in Chicago, organized by the Illinois Manufacturers Association and the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center. Over 400 industry leaders, government officials, and stakeholders gathered to discuss supply chain resilience, advanced manufacturing, and workforce development in the defense sector. Five Greater Peoria manufacturers—Enercon, Fluid Dynamics, Peoria Production Solutions, Omni, and Cast Technologies—demonstrated our region's significant capabilities, opening doors to new partnerships and investments in defense manufacturing.

Introducing Economic Recovery Corps Fellow: A New Venture in Business Outreach

In February, GPEDC welcomed Economic Recovery Corps Fellow Dorsey Hill to our team. Made possible by the U.S. Economic Development Administration and coordinated by the International Economic Development Council, Dorsey's fellowship focuses on business outreach throughout rural communities in collaboration with Lincoln Economic Advancement and Development (LEAD). This enhanced outreach initiative underscores GPEDC's commitment to connecting with businesses where they are, ensuring we understand their unique challenges and opportunities. By fostering these relationships, we help local companies grow, address barriers to success, and identify broader regional initiatives that can catalyze economic development.

QUICK HITS

- 150 ElevateGP business engagements.
- Connected Crane Equipment & Service with Illinois DCEO and supported preparation and submission of their approved EDGE Tax Credit application.
- Partnered with Morton to submit a CDBG Economic Development \$600,000 grant application for Crane Equipment & Service in support of their \$5.1M expansion project.
- Community Navigators helped 35 businesses receive \$660,000 in state B2B NewBiz grants.
- Partnered with Tri-County Regional Planning Commission on to receive a 5 year, \$500,000 Brownfield Assessment grant from US EPA.
- Facilitated use of Enterprise Zones to incentivize construction of 7 new homes in Chillicothe and a \$5.7M solar farm in unincorporated Peoria County.
- Assisted the Heart of Illinois Regional Port District Board with acquiring a US EPA Clean Ports Planning Grant where \$1M will benefit our regional ports.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Greater Peoria EDC 2024 Annual Report

We connect partners and employers in the workforce development ecosystem to ensure the development of a more resilient, robust, and equitable talent pipeline.

Highlights

Career Spark!

The 8th annual CareerSpark expo, a joint venture between GPEDC and Junior Achievement of Central Illinois, drew over 4000 students representing 75+ schools. More than one hundred employers and careers were represented by 450+ volunteers who supported logistics and demonstrated career pathways through hands-on activities with the students. CareerSpark remains a flagship initiative that inspires communities across the state to emulate the event and helps our region build an informed talent pipeline. This year, the GPEDC supported the expansion of CareerSpark to Lincoln, with over 200 students at their first event.

75+

SCHOOLS REPRESENTED
AT CAREERSPARK

130+

COMPANIES ON GREATER
PEORIA REGIONAL JOB
BOARD



Students at exploring careers at CareerSpark



Newmark team at the relaunch of the RWA

Driving Workforce Development and Collaboration

We gathered over fifty community leaders at Illinois Central College's Peoria campus for a workshop hosted by GPEDC, the CEO Council, and the Regional Workforce Alliance. Dr. Sheila Quirk-Bailey highlighted the impact of the RWA over the past five years. Then Newmark's Kim Moore and Emma Nippe shared insights from their labor analysis on regional trends and strategies for continued improvement. This relaunch of the RWA reaffirms our commitment to driving the initiatives to build a diverse, skilled workforce equipped to meet the evolving demands of a dynamic economy.

Talent Attraction with Choose Greater Peoria

Partnering with the Choose Greater Peoria initiative has brought a lot of success - this coordinated effort of highly visible marketing and a hands-on, white-glove concierge service to get a very warm introduction to our region, we have successfully grown the region, one highly-skilled professional at a time - bringing 21 individuals, directly and indirectly, influencing another 150+ to choose Greater Peoria with exceptional, curated materials about our region.

QUICK HITS

- Hosted Lunch & Learn, bringing over 25 employers to learn of apprenticeships with SkillsUSA.
- Delivered over 100 Occupation Snapshot reports to educators and community orgs for grants.
- Partnered with Distillery Labs to launch High School program: Slices & Startups.
- Greater Peoria Pathways was named a Top 5 Leadership Community for CTE enrollment.
- Supported sourcing funding for Peoria Public Schools' new apprenticeship program.
- Healthcare Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) launched for Greater Peoria.
- SkillBridge partners in Greater Peoria increased from 2 in 2023 to 21 in 2024.
- Supported 12 regional high schools in finding non-traditional work-study opportunities.
- Partnered with Central Illinois Special Education Association to connect students with mild disabilities with employers.



Participants at the Workforce Solutions Expo

We ensure that our region's rural communities are full participants in the region's economy and have access to the resources they need to keep themselves vibrant and vital.

\$7M+
GRANT WRITING
ASSISTANCE FOR RURAL
PROJECTS

3 COUNTY
BROADBAND
FEASIBILITY STUDIES

Highlights

AgTech Connect: Driving Innovation in Agriculture

Ag. Tech Connect, plays a vital role in this mission by connecting people, ideas, and resources to launch and grow businesses within the region. During this past year we held four different networking events that provided a greater understanding of local ag businesses, resources and opportunities for business development within the agriculture sector. More than 175 businesses and organizations participated in these events. Key outcomes from the networking included targeted discussions with both public and private sector funding opportunities, introductions to key university resources, support for new ag. business startups, and continued focus on building a network of resources for business development. Key resources that have directly impacted local ag. industries includes Illinois Soy Innovation Center, Illinois Fermentation and Agricultural Bioprocessing Hub, The Center for Veterinary Innovation, Peoria NEXT Innovation Center, USDA National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, Serra Ventures, Venture Capital Program Managers, Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, Illinois Innovation Fund, National Center for Digital Agriculture, Illinois Corn Growers Association, Distillery Labs, gBeta, and Bradley University SBDC.

Broadband Development: Expanding Connectivity Across Greater Peoria

County-based planning efforts continued in 2024, with Logan County participating in the Illinois Office of Broadband/Illinois Soybean Association-sponsored planning effort, Broadband Breakthrough. In addition, feasibility studies were completed in both Mason and Tazewell Counties, supported by Illinois Energy Transition Funding and the Just Transition Fund. These studies offered comprehensive documentation of areas of need, possible network designs, financing mechanisms, and collaboration opportunities to expand broadband service in underserved parts of each county. They also fostered stronger relationships with service providers, laying the groundwork for future investments. By applying these findings, we aim to generate innovative connectivity solutions for our region—ensuring that communities across Greater Peoria can thrive in the digital age.

Bartonville's Vision: Crafting a Future-Ready Comprehensive Plan

In January, GPEDC joined forces with the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission to help the Village of Bartonville revamp its Comprehensive Plan, last updated in 2006. Kathie Brown and Sally Hanley led a workshop to discuss the port, industrial parks, business incubation strategies, TIF districts, and broadband access. Bartonville, Bellevue, and Limestone Township representatives contributed to the Q&A and brainstorming sessions, laying a collaborative foundation for the community's future growth.



Participants at the Planning Session



Kathie Brown Leading AgTech Connect Sessions

QUICK HITS

- Supported expanding Enterprise Zone benefits for Mason County, Havana, Princeville, and Creve Coeur.
- Partnered with the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission to assist with new Comprehensive Plans in Bartonville, Chillicothe, and Creve Coeur.
- Supported thirteen different community projects for funding through state and federal grants totalling \$7M in requests.
- Worked with the U of I Department of Urban and Regional Planning to begin a renewable energy study to better understand this industry and its economic opportunities.

GREATER PEORIA MANUFACTURING NETWORK

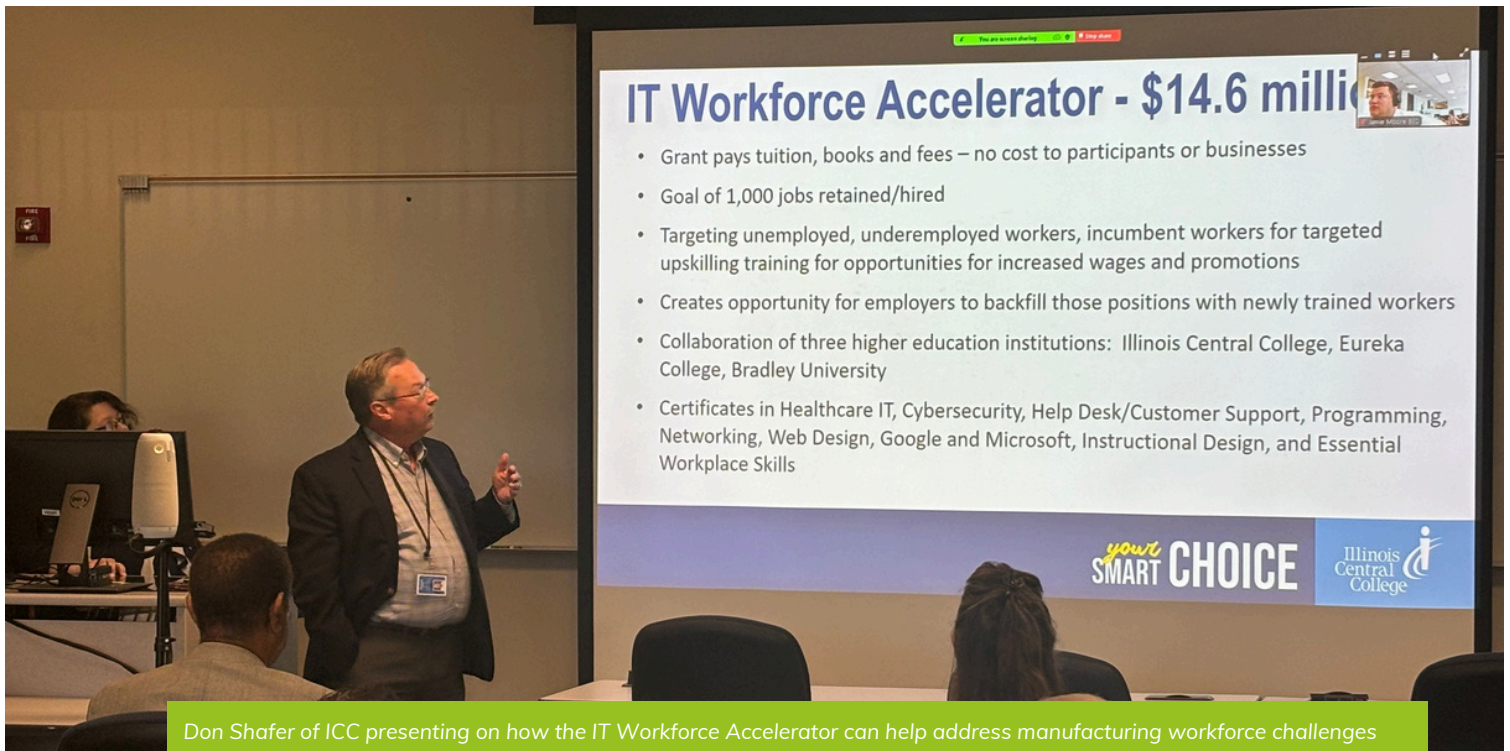
We connect the region's manufacturing community to one another and market their individual and collective capabilities to the world.

22
NETWORK
MEMBERS

Highlights

Manufacturing Network Addresses Workforce Solutions

At the March 14 Quarterly Meeting of the Greater Peoria Manufacturing Network (GPMN), members focused on “Workforce Solutions” in manufacturing. Rich Oakes from GigSmart introduced the possibilities of a gig economy model. At the same time, local entities—including Pekin Community High School and ICC’s IT Workforce Accelerator—presented practical strategies for recruitment and retention. By creating an environment for sharing industry-focused ideas, GPMN empowers manufacturers with concrete tools to build and sustain a skilled workforce.



Collaboration with the Illinois Manufacturers Association

During October Manufacturing Month, the GPMN hosted a Happy Hour for the final stop of the IMA Makers on the Move Tour Bus, which also visited two GPMN member companies. This event introduced GPMN members to IMA leadership, sparking new familiarity and collaboration. Together, GPMN and IMA now visit Peoria-area manufacturers to share how the IMA advocates at the state level while the GPMN supports local manufacturing needs. This joint approach amplifies benefits for all members, who see great value in having a strong statewide partner.



COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

We connect GPEDC's various programs to cohesively communicate our activities, initiatives, opportunities, regional assets and achievements across the region and beyond.

500K+
ORGANIC SOCIAL MEDIA
IMPRESSIONS

30K+
TOTAL ENGAGEMENTS

Highlights

Economic Development Forum with Jay Garner

GPEDC hosted an inaugural Economic Development Forum featuring Jay Garner, who spoke to 125 community and business leaders. Garner emphasized the importance of real estate development, a diverse talent pipeline, dynamic downtown areas, and cohesive regional branding. He also toured Greater Peoria, including the Peoria Riverfront Museum, gaining firsthand exposure to the region's standout amenities.

Updated Program Guide: A Resource for Regional Growth

This year, an updated GPEDC Program Guide was released, detailing our core initiatives—Business Attraction, Business Assistance, Workforce Solutions, Rural Development, the Greater Peoria Manufacturing Network, and Strategic Planning. By articulating our goals, approach, and programs more comprehensively, we empower local partners and stakeholders to align efforts for a more significant regional impact.

Highlighting Available Properties

To further assist potential investors and local business leaders, GPEDC now produces a brochure showcasing key properties available in the region. This brochure circulates among targeted stakeholders, ensuring they have up-to-date information and can consider new opportunities to grow and invest in Greater Peoria.

DCI Marketing Summit

In a rare and valuable opportunity for niche professionals in economic development marketing, our Communications & Marketing Manager, David, participated in the DCI Marketing Summit in New York City. The summit included 25 senior-level economic development marketers nationwide, who gathered to share best practices on talent attraction, place branding, and community resilience. Key takeaways included fresh approaches to measuring success, forging compelling regional narratives, and tracking return on investment for marketing initiatives.



David with colleagues at DCI Marketing Summit in New York



Chris Setti and Jay Garner at the Economic Development Forum

QUICK HITS

- Supported Distillery Labs' ribbon-cutting with media, press, social, and AV assistance, ensuring a successful launch and ongoing programming support.
- Developed a Bioprocessing industry profile to showcase our region's bioprocessing prowess.
- Promoted Economic Development Week.
- Partnered with Strictly Hip-Hop and Distillery Labs for the Ugly Christmas Business Party, merging hip-hop culture with entrepreneurship through facility tours, fast pitches, and raffle prizes—and generating strong social media impressions and earned media.
- Teamed with ERC Fellow Dorsey Hill to refine EDC Forge, streamlining our BRE data capture process, creating tutorials, and customizing the system for more user-friendly surveys.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Greater Peoria EDC 2024 Annual Report

We collaborate with local partners to develop data-driven strategies that support Greater Peoria's sustainable growth and long-term economic vitality.

Highlights

Distillery Labs: Catalyzing Innovation and Education

After eight years of dedicated planning and partnership, we proudly celebrated the grand opening of Distillery Labs—Greater Peoria's new hub of innovation and entrepreneurship. The opening of Distillery Labs is a testament to putting planning into action. Our community understood that its economic future is connected to its ability to develop and support innovative entrepreneurs and companies, and that it needed a physical center to serve as a platform for a diverse, robust startup ecosystem. GPEDC was a leading force behind Distillery Labs from the onset. It brought together the initial stakeholders to craft a vision for the facility, spearheaded efforts to secure the critical federal funding, provided day-to-day leadership between executives, and served as a continual advisor, convener and connector to ensure the project's success. GPEDC is proud to see the results a community's dedication to its own future.

Since opening, Distillery Labs has hosted impactful events such as the Illinois Falling Walls Lab pitch competition, featuring local startups like HuMod, ShotHawk, and Rehab Ranger. It also welcomed the Illinois Innovation Network board meeting and the Startup Showcase, where nine graduates of the gBETA program made their first public pitches to a packed audience. Distillery Labs is also the new home of GPEDC which relocated in early August to serve as an anchor tenant and be better positioned to help the companies of tomorrow succeed.



Distillery Labs building at night.



Proud Moment; Distillery Labs Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Expanding the Team to Enhance Programmatic Offerings

Early 2024 brought significant changes to our team as we strive to better serve the Greater Peoria region:

- Sara Kupperschmid joined as our Workforce Solutions Partner, supporting our expanding role in talent pipeline development.
- Courtney Moore came onboard as our Talent Concierge, a new role created with the Choose Greater Peoria initiative to assist potential transplants with job placement at major regional employers.
- Dorsey Hill began a 30-month fellowship through the Economic Recovery Corps, further strengthening our capacity for business outreach, especially in rural communities.
- Kirsten Montgomery joined as our new Research & Insights Manager, a role focused on harnessing data to guide and bolster our economic development efforts.

These additions ensure we can fully address emerging priorities in talent attraction, business retention, and data-driven decision-making.

Strengthening Our Regional Vision: CEDS Update

Greater Peoria's Big Table Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is entering its final year, and GPEDC continues compiling an annual report highlighting the progress made toward its goals. The 2024 update showcases remarkable achievements, including the opening of Distillery Labs, the 7th annual Career Spark event, a brownfield assessment grant award, and transformative downtown and Main Street improvements. While GPEDC develops and stewards the CEDS, numerous regional partner organizations collaborate to achieve these shared objectives. This year's CEDS Recap highlights the collective successes of our diverse community and looks ahead to the next growth phase.

THANKS TO OUR 2024 INVESTORS

LEADERSHIP LEVEL INVESTOR



PLATINUM LEVEL INVESTORS



GOLD LEVEL INVESTORS



SILVER LEVEL INVESTORS

Ameren | Bradley University | City of East Peoria | City of Washington | Good Energy | Mason County West Central Illinois Building and Construction Trades Council | Woodford County

BRONZE LEVEL INVESTORS

Advanced Medical Transport | Bard Optical | Busey Bank | Heartland Bank | Illinois Central College | Komatsu America Corp | Logan County | Morton Community Bank | River City Construction | RLI Corporation | Village of Peoria Heights | Wabash Valley Power Alliance

OUR FRIENDS

1060 Machine
American Water Works Co
ARi Global
Cast Technologies
CGN & Associates, Inc
City of Chillicothe
City of El Paso
City of Elmwood
City of Eureka
City of Havana
City of Lincoln
City of West Peoria
Comcast
Commerce Bank

CORE Construction
DSMH Consulting
Enercon
Farnsworth Group
G&D Integrated
Goodwill Industries of Central IL
Hanson Professional Services
Hardin Industries
Heart of Illinois United Way
Heart Technologies, Inc.
Inland Tool
Integris Engineering
Iowa Interstate Railroad
Lozier Oil Company

Metamora Industries
Morton EDC
Morton Industries
O'Shea Builders, Inc.
Peoria Production Solutions
Phillipi Hagenbuch
Quality Metal Products
RWE Clean Energy
SMF
Trajectory Energy Partners
TRIGO - SCS
Village of Germantown Hills

A special appreciation to the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) for their continuous support and investments in us and the region.





GREATER PEORIA
Economic Development Council

WORK WITH US

The Greater Peoria EDC is both a regional economic development planning organization and a traditional public-private partnership charged with executing on the region's plan. The organization is funded by investments from our counties and cities, our partners at the US Economic Development Administration and other state and federal entities, as well as the leading businesses located in Greater Peoria. Together, we're a catalyst for creating a vibrant economy that is sustainable, diverse, and globally competitive. Together, we are more effective at sharing our story, taking advantage of opportunities and voicing issues of a collective concern

Together, we maximize our chances of success.



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