

Q2

2026

APRIL — JUNE

From Celebration to Coordinated Action

100 years of organized economic development. A five-pillar playbook for the region's future. A healthcare education consortium six institutions strong.



01 Economic Development Week 2026: A Region Reflects On 100 Years Of Impact

Greater Peoria joined economic development professionals nationwide May 4–8 to mark 100 years of organized economic development in the United States — honoring the practice, the people behind it locally, and the century ahead.

The week opened with **Future-Proof: What AI Can't Replace Is You**, a hands-on program for area high school students at Distillery Labs, presented with DIGIM, ICC TRIO, and Microsoft. Students explored how AI is reshaping the workplace and which skills remain distinctly human: judgment, creativity, and connection. The City of Peoria issued a proclamation honoring the century milestone, and the **100 Years of Impact** series ran on social media all week.

GPEDC also organized a day at Distillery Labs centered on the public launch of the 2025 Big Table Report. The morning featured an ecosystem panel moderated by Doug Cruitt with CEO Chris Setti, Bradley's Eric Sampson, and gBETA's Danielle Scarzello — followed by a founder conversation with Brandon Johnson (ShotHawk), Matt Dylewski (HuMod BioTech), Rajeev Kumar (Distillery Labs), and Samm Hutchison (Bear's Bites).

Anchoring the launch inside Economic Development Week was intentional: 100 years of impact is about carrying momentum forward. GPEDC thanks the City of Peoria and every partner, sponsor, student, and community member who took part. Greater Peoria's economic story is written by the people who show up to build it.



— Students at Distillery Labs, May 4



— EDW Building the Ecosystem Panel



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02 The 2025 Big Table Report: A Five-Pillar Framework For Greater Peoria's Future

GPEDC released The Big Table: Greater Peoria 2025 Report, closing a year of community conversations. The report captures findings from five Big Table events held across Greater Peoria's five counties between October 2025 and February 2026, during which residents, business leaders, educators, nonprofit professionals, and elected officials discussed the region's future.

For the first time, the report includes a Strategy Framework: five measurable pillars with suggested Key Performance Indicators that carry community insights directly into the next Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The pillars address structural barriers, the talent pipeline, the entrepreneurial ecosystem, livability, and how the region tells its own story. The cross-county themes that surfaced most consistently include the call to make existing resources easier to find, the recognition of childcare as core economic infrastructure, and a maturing conversation around workforce pipelines stretching from middle school through retirement. Those insights are shaping implementation across all five pillars. The full report is available on our website and serves as a shared playbook for the region.

5

Big Table events across five counties

5

Measurable pillars with suggested KPIs

1

Shared playbook for the region



Big Table Report Press Launch

THE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

01 Structural Barriers	02 Talent Pipeline	03 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	04 Livability	05 Telling Our Story
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Read the full report



03 Greater Peoria Healthcare Education Consortium Launches At The Riverfront Museum

On May 19, the Greater Peoria Healthcare Education Consortium launched at the Peoria Riverfront Museum. The Consortium unites six leading educational and healthcare organizations behind one vision: establishing Greater Peoria as a national center of excellence in healthcare education and collaboration.

Members are Bradley University, Methodist College (Carle Health), Illinois Central College, Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing (OSF HealthCare), Peoria Public Schools District 150, and the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria. In Year 1, the Consortium will build pathways from primary school exploration to medical and graduate degrees across Peoria, Tazewell, Woodford, Mason, and Logan Counties, with programs including the Mini-Medical School (grades 4 through 6), the Medical Immersion Program (grade 12), the Healthcare Education Mobile Classroom (grades 9 through 12), Customized Learning Content Kits, regional Healthcare Professions Clubs, and post-secondary Academic Pathways and Pipeline Programs.

This is what regional collaboration looks like when institutions move beyond conversation into coordinated action. Learn more at peoriahealthed.org.

Current Member Institutions:





YEAR 1 PATHWAYS

Mini-Medical School (gr. 4–6) · Medical Immersion (gr. 12) · Mobile Classroom (gr. 9–12) · Learning Content Kits · Healthcare Professions Clubs · Academic Pathways & Pipeline Programs

peoriahealthed.org



— Launch of The Consortium

04 Food, Fiber, Fuel & Defense

AgTech Connect At Alto Ingredients Draws The Largest Gathering Yet



The latest AgTech Connect took the conversation to Alto Ingredients in Pekin, a leading producer of specialty alcohols and high-value ingredients, and drew what may have been the series' largest crowd yet, a sign of the momentum building around the future of food, fiber, and fuel.

Agriculture remains a major engine of the Central Illinois economy, and the region's abundant feedstock keeps opening doors for new businesses and jobs. Gathering growers, researchers, industry, and regional partners at a working facility makes that opportunity tangible. GPEDC thanks Alto Ingredients for hosting and everyone who joined.

Greater Peoria Joins the Illinois Clean Ports Program

Five port districts along the Illinois River and within the Illinois Waterway Ports Commission have partnered with the Illinois EPA on the Illinois Clean Ports Program, funded through the U.S. EPA's Clean Ports Program. Running April 2026 through December 2027 with support from CALSTART, the program funds decarbonization and climate resiliency planning for the Heart of Illinois, Havana, Illinois Valley, Ottawa, and Seneca port districts.

Port districts are special-purpose public authorities that plan and fund port and waterborne commerce infrastructure, quiet but essential players in the regional economy. Our CEO was invited to serve on the program's Steering Committee, which will guide the project, weigh how decarbonization strategies that enhance resilience and energy security may influence local economic development, and ensure community feedback is reflected in the final plan.

Illinois Defense Industry Day: Greater Peoria at the Table

GPEDC joined partners at the Illinois Defense Manufacturing Communities Consortium (ILDMCC) to help sponsor Illinois Defense Industry Day in Naperville. The event brought manufacturers, defense experts, and support organizations together to map the opportunities emerging from new federal spending and shifting national priorities.

For a region built on making the things the world depends on, defense manufacturing is a meaningful avenue for growth, and Greater Peoria's manufacturing base is well-suited to compete. GPEDC thanks IMEC Illinois for an outstanding agenda and its continued leadership in strengthening Illinois manufacturing.

Come grow with us.

Connecting businesses & organizations with resources for success.

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