

CONNECTING EDUCATORS TO AGTECH INNOVATION

GPEDC and Distillery Labs hosted a special AgTech Connect session for agriculture teachers from 14 school districts. With support from Illinois Agriculture Education, the meeting introduced educators to tools and strategies for teaching entrepreneurship and business development. Presenters from the University of Illinois, gener8tor Distillery Labs, and McDaniel's Marketing shared ideas designed to enrich the classroom experience for more than 1,500 students across Central Illinois. Future sessions will bring students directly into Distillery Labs for applied learning opportunities.



BIG TABLE 2025: BUILDING SOLUTIONS TOGETHER

The launch of Big Table Greater Peoria 2025 was announced this quarter, with a press conference at Distillery Labs unveiling event details and issuing a call for facilitators. Scheduled for October 17–18, this year's convening will focus on four regional priorities: building a talent pipeline, fostering startups, enhancing livability, and expanding access to opportunity. Keynote speaker Victor Hwang, founder of Right to Start, will help set the tone for two days of collaborative problem-solving. Scan the QR Code to explore the register and learn more.



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 **GREATER PEORIA**
Economic Development Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

April- June 2025



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DAMERA GROUP SELECTS GREATER PEORIA FOR FIRST U.S. MANUFACTURING OPERATION

We secured a significant business attraction win this quarter as Damera Corporation, a Canadian manufacturer of the all-electric eJest public transit bus, announced plans to establish its first U.S. manufacturing facility in Greater Peoria. The company will invest over \$30 million and create at least 90 new jobs. They are initially operating out of a warehouse in East Peoria as they await federal approval. This decision reinforces the region's growing reputation as a hub for clean energy and advanced manufacturing—and it began with a single connection. Damera's introduction to Illinois originated at the 2023 Select USA conference, where representatives from Intersect Illinois first met the company. That initial conversation led to a request for information that ultimately brought Greater Peoria into consideration. GPEDC returned to the Select USA conference in 2024, joining more than 5,000 global business leaders to promote the region's competitive advantages in talent, infrastructure, and cost efficiency. These strategic engagements are crucial for maintaining Greater Peoria's competitiveness when companies are deciding where to expand.



STARTUP SHOWCASE CELEBRATES INNOVATION DURING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WEEK

As part of Economic Development Week, GPEDC hosted a Startup Showcase at Distillery Labs to highlight innovation across the region. Five early-stage companies—Bear's Bites, HuMod, AgDefense Systems, dotbox, and enterN—delivered live pitches to an engaged audience, followed by a discussion on the realities of building a business in Central Illinois. The event was livestreamed and received media coverage, reinforcing the community's support for entrepreneurship and early-stage innovation.



EXPLORING STARTUP STRATEGIES IN CEDAR RAPIDS

To strengthen Greater Peoria's entrepreneurial support systems, a regional delegation traveled to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to study a city with comparable demographics and a strong startup track record. Hosted by the New Bohemian Innovation Collaborative (NewBoCo), the visit included tours of the state's first startup accelerator, nonprofit incubators, and Coe College, where they examined how local education institutions align with innovation efforts. The insights gathered will help inform improvements to Distillery Labs and other regional programs, with a reciprocal visit from Cedar Rapids planned.



PROMOTING ILLINOIS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE: TRADE MISSION TO MEXICO CITY

GPEDC joined Governor Pritzker and Lt. Governor Stratton on a trade mission to Mexico City to strengthen economic ties and promote investment opportunities in Illinois. Alongside Intersect Illinois and the Mid-Illinois Collaborative, the delegation met with business leaders and visited key partners such as Orbia, parent company of the Vestolit PVC facility in Henry. These connections support long-term investment in the region's manufacturing and agricultural sectors, positioning Greater Peoria as a competitive player in international trade.

