

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - March 22, 2010
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More cooperation needed to move region forward

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - by [Rich Rovito](#)

Regional cooperation efforts need to extend beyond the city of Milwaukee and into all regions of the metropolitan area, Waukesha County business and community leaders claim.

Although praising the efforts of **Milwaukee 7**, an economic development group for the seven counties in southeast Wisconsin, for working to attract businesses to the area, much of the work has focused on attracting businesses to Milwaukee, several Waukesha community and business leaders said at a recent roundtable.

"I'm glad there's an M7, but it's too M-centric," said Mike Mooney, chairman of **MLG Commercial Inc.**, Brookfield. "We have a lot of difficulty getting involved, and we're sort of standing on the sidelines. Decisions get made, and we're not really invited to the dance."

Nonetheless, Mooney thinks that Milwaukee 7, founded in 2004, has the "best chance of helping to foster regional thinking."

"It's got the best leverage, the best hammer let's say, to shake people up and get them to understand what's beyond their municipal lines, but I think it could do more, and I would hope it will do more," said Mooney, who was one of 13 panelists who took part in The Business Journal's CEO Forum on Eastern Waukesha County March 9 at the **Brookfield Suites Hotel & Convention Center**.

Waukesha County is a "critical economic component" of the region, said Jim Paetsch, director of corporate expansion and relocation for Milwaukee 7.

"We've had some wins in Waukesha County," he said.

In many instances, companies considering locating in southeast Wisconsin already have a specific area in mind when they approach Milwaukee 7, he said.

"We present sites that meet their criteria," Paetsch said. "There have been many potential deals in which we presented sites in Waukesha County. But it's a win for us whether it's in Waukesha County, Racine, Pleasant Prairie or Port Washington."

'Jury's still out'

Waukesha Mayor Larry Nelson said he had no contact with Milwaukee 7 during his first year in office in 2006. He eventually was appointed to Milwaukee 7's Regional Economic Development Advisory Council as an at-large member.

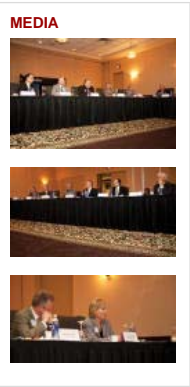
"I've tried in my couple years on there to make sure that it is a regional focus," Nelson said. "I think the M7 has been really important because it is the one place where elected officials and business leaders come together on a regular basis, but I think we need to meet more regularly and for longer periods of time and take the M7 to the next level."

Suzanne Kelley, president of the **Waukesha County Chamber of Commerce**, views the Milwaukee 7 as a "step in the right direction toward regional cooperation."

"I think the jury's still out as to where it's heading and whether it's going to live up to its full potential," said Kelley, who is one of three representatives from Waukesha County on the M7 council. "I think there is a perception that it is a bit Milwaukee-centric, but I think that's because some of the projects that have received the most attention are Milwaukee projects. However, there are things going on throughout the entire region."

Kelley pointed out that due to the involvement of the Milwaukee 7, Dickten Masch Plastics, a Nashotah manufacturer, was awarded \$293,000 in economic development tax credits from the **Wisconsin Department of Commerce** that helped fund a \$2.8 million expansion at the company's Waukesha County factory. The project resulted in the retention of 165 jobs with the potential to add another 75.

"That didn't get as much publicity as the recent Milwaukee projects, but I think the M-7 is looking at doing projects throughout the region," Kelley said. "I think it's also the responsibility of business leaders in Waukesha County to really continue to push to get engaged in M-7's efforts."



Productive meeting

Dickten Masch, which produces plastic components for the power tool, electronics, small engine, construction, health care and food industries, learned of a state tax credit program, which offers incentives tied to job creation, after a meeting between Steve Dyer, the company's president and chief executive officer, and a Milwaukee 7 representative.

"A cup of coffee at a place on Blue Mound Road led to nearly \$300,000 in tax credits for our company," Dyer said.

Milwaukee 7 put Dyer in touch with someone at the Wisconsin Department of Commerce, which awarded the credits. Without the efforts of Milwaukee 7, Dickten Masch management wouldn't have been aware of the program, Dyer said.

"We don't know what we don't know," he said.

Dickten Masch, which also has a plant in Iowa, had to decide whether it made sense to invest in its Nashotah factory. The company's decision to expand its local plant not only preserved jobs, but came with a pledge to add new jobs, Paetsch said.

Milwaukee 7 should be given credit for its recent efforts to attract businesses to Milwaukee, said John Hunzinger, president of **Hunzinger Construction Co.**, Brookfield. The recent successes have included **Talgo Inc.**, a Spanish train manufacturer that plans to create 125 jobs at a plant to be constructed on the city's north side, and Ingeteam, another Spanish firm, which plans to build a plant in the Menomonee Valley to produce goods for the wind and solar energy industry. The plant is expected to eventually employ as many as 275 workers.

However, Hunzinger questioned how effective Milwaukee 7 can be given its relatively low level of funding compared with other cities.

Milwaukee 7's annual budget is less than that of regional economic development groups in cities such as Buffalo, N.Y.; Knoxville, Tenn.; and two Ohio cities — Columbus and Toledo, Hunzinger noted.

"Maybe we aren't doing enough to support these kinds of efforts," he said.

The health of the business community in the city of Milwaukee affects what happens in other parts of the region, said Patrick Schmitt, dean of the **University of Wisconsin-Waukesha**.

"We talk about things being too Milwaukee-centric, but the fact of the matter is that there are serious issues in Milwaukee that we tend to walk around rather than to address directly," he said. "The educational infrastructure, for instance, which has been a subject of great discussion but still remains tremendously unresolved. And the news that comes out of Milwaukee on virtually a daily basis makes people wonder about the continued viability of the city. For us, this is a serious issue."

Businesses in Waukesha County "can't divorce" themselves from what goes on in the city of Milwaukee, he said.

"Ultimately (Milwaukee) will either flourish with us or it will sicken us, and we have to really look at the issues involved in making that city better and the kind of contribution it's going to take from business, from education, and from the state," Schmitt said.

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