

# QUARTERLY REPORT

Q1 2020



The purpose of this quarterly report is to give members of the Greater Freeport Partnership a clear understanding of the goals and progress of the organization in an easily noted format.

## VISION

The Greater Freeport Partnership is the place where organizations and people unite to advocate for the region, drive economic growth and champion a talented, workforce-ready community.

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## NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

On behalf of the Greater Freeport Partnership, I would like to thank you for your support over the past year. We understand the impact of COVID-19 on our local business community and the challenges this poses. We value your partnership in addressing the needs of our business community. The Partnership has been working hard during this unprecedented time to be a resource of credible information and support for the local business community.

Your continued commitment to the Partnership has helped us become Stephenson County's trusted resource for business services, catalyst of development activity and strongest advocate for attracting visitors, residents and new business.

In mid-May, we will welcome our new executive director, Mark Williams, and we look forward to his leadership as we continue our dedication to the mission of promoting Stephenson County - especially in these challenging times.

*Tess Dahm*  
*Interim Executive Director*



# Q1 PROGRESS ON KEY INITIATIVES

## *Economic Development*

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- Revolving Loan Fund:
  - Navigated one applicant through the application process for the Downtown Revitalization Loan Fund. Applicant/downtown building owner is currently renovating his building and slated to move-in later this summer.
  - Assisted another applicant through the process. Application is currently on-hold due to other circumstances.
- Workforce:
  - Worked with FSD 145 and HCC leaders to plan and execute FHS Academies' Founding Partners Meeting. Over forty area businesses participated in the Founding Partners meeting.
  - Continue to engage local employers to interview Stephenson County Probation Job Readiness class participants. At the end of 2019, the program had had 20 participants with a 71% job retention rate.
  - Recruited a team of YPN members to plan events and activities for the Young Professionals Network. Social, educational, and community involvement activities were all planned. One successful social event was held before events were suspended due to coronavirus outbreak.
- Census:
  - Subrecipient of grant award from Illinois Department of Human Services for \$9,590.00 for Census outreach activities to rural Stephenson County.
  - Coordinated radio and billboard Census promotion for Stephenson County audience.
  - Provide twice weekly Census updates for social media channels and the Partnership's weekly newsletter.
  - Presented information on the 2020 Census to various groups and service organization throughout Stephenson County.
  - Wrote two Census articles for the Rolling Stone publication.
  - Sent Census information to in-home daycares in Stephenson County.

## *Membership*

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- We created and delivered "Happy New Year" baskets of local foods to our Partnership members to thank them for their extraordinary support throughout the year.
- Increased membership by more than two percent from the first quarter of 2019 and added some Partnership level members.

### Membership Summary

- Basic Members - 289
- Subsidiary Members - 6
- NFP/Gov't/Religious/Individual - 93
- Major Partner - 29
- Premier Partner 12
- Total Members - 429

## Business & Community Outreach

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- Women's Enrichment Network (WEN):
  - Held monthly Women's Enrichment Network meeting, averaging 30 attendees. So far this year we have presented on the following topics: local mental health resources, stress relief & movement on the job, home organization, and decision fatigue. We have 47 paid group members.
  - Coordinated and facilitated WEN's first book club meeting. We met virtually, April 9th to discuss Lean In.
- Data Support:
  - Sent potential grant opportunities to 25 area non-profits and Stephenson County school districts.
  - Supplied relevant data and images to Northwest Quarterly magazine for an article looking at regional economic development issues and trends.
  - Working with City officials to coordinate and organize a visit from the White House Opportunity & Revitalization Council to hold a series of roundtable discussion with local stakeholders. Visit has been postponed due to COVID-19.
  - Participated in a conference call between Fehr Graham and County officials to discuss infrastructure projects and the Rebuild IL grant program.
  - Participated in meeting between Blackhawk Hills Regional Council, City of Freeport and iFiber concerning a future EDA grant submission.
- COVID-19:
  - Created special website menu with daily updates and multiple social media graphics per day for resources and information.
  - Continually working on reviewing and outlining COVID-19 related business and community resources to our membership. Information is published on our website, emailed to our membership and posted on our social media channels.
  - Coordinated meeting between County officials and DCEO concerning a COVID-19 related grant program.
  - Contacted Stephenson County area restaurants, bars and hotels to notify them of the Hospitality Grant Program.
- After soliciting suggestions from more than 30 local manufacturers, we submitted four Stephenson County made products to the Illinois Manufacturers' Associations "Makers' Madness: The Coolest Thing Made in Illinois" contest.
- Prepared "Starting a Business Resource Guide" for uploading to our website. Solicited input from the Business Services Committee.
- Worked with 10-12 people who were starting or were interested in starting new businesses. Provided these people with advice and access to resources, including the SBDC and the business start-up collection at the Freeport Public Library.

## Marketing & Tourism

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- Compiled and approved creation of 2020 ALL IN Stephenson County Community Guide. Printed 30,000 copies with Freeport Journal Standard and received copies March 1. Distribution of guides began immediately, but was quickly halted with COVID-19 concerns. When distribution resumes,
  - 10,000 guides to Chicagoland hotels, universities, hospitals and attractions.
  - 2,500 guides to other tourism offices in Illinois (first installment)
  - 6,000 guides to local outlets
- Hosted Illinois Freedom Project Exhibit at the Stephenson County Visitor Center to draw in visitors as well as high school students who were following the accompanied curriculum.
- Attended Chicago Bridal Expo and Chicago Cubs Convention inviting bridal parties and Cubs fans to consider visiting and hosting events in Stephenson County.
- Continue to produce weekly issues of ALL IN Stephenson County digital events guide highlighting events and activities for residents and visitors. The guide reaches over 6,000 people each week at no charge to event hosts or readers.
- With the onset of COVID-19 at the end of March, greaterfreeport.com saw a 300 percent increase in website views for community, restaurant, online shopping and business resource information.
- Q1 welcomed 2,006 people to the Stephenson County Visitor Center. The visitor center as well as all tourism information centers in Illinois, was closed on March 21.
- Held three Rise n' Shines and two Business After Hours. The third Business After Hours was replaced with a video tour and interview due to state-side stay-at-home order.
- Sought bids for web site redesign for greaterfreeport.com.
- Working with local videographer and photographer to begin shooting promotional pieces for many attractions and events in Stephenson County for future use.
- Continue to direct visitors, residents and businesses to access our web site and social media channels. Web site visits increased 300 percent from January 2020 to March 2020 as people search for COVID-19 information. Daily average impressions on Facebook continues to reach 14,000.

## Beautification

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- Received grant award of \$20,774.00 funding 21 pieces of streetscape furniture for downtown Freeport from the Dr. Louis & Violet Rubin Fund of the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois.
- Wrote and submitted an application to HGTV Town Take Over.
- Project managing the #FreeportReflections, a vacant storefront window art activation program. The program is funded by a grant from the Freeport Community Foundation. Regional artist will install art installations in five vacant storefronts throughout Freeport's downtown. #FreeportReflections program opening was set for April, but has been postponed due to COVID-19.
- Created and went through preliminary design approval of Downtown Freeport vertical banners denoting the downtown business district. Banner expenses were put on hold due to funding limitations from COVID-19.