

SOUTHWEST ITBEC

Late 2015 and 2016 Activity

The Southwest ITBEC Board reaffirmed their role to act as an umbrella organization in the region to foster collaboration, to stimulate and promote economic growth. Working partnerships continued between the Southwest ITBEC and regional organizations including, the 7 Rivers Alliance, Wisconsin Rural Partners, Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club, Hidden Valleys of Southwest Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Ag Tourism Association, and the Outdoor Recreation Alliance.

- The Southwest ITBEC will again be a sponsor of **Sparta's *Holiday Lights***, a community volunteer program, for the 2015 - 2016 holiday season. Since 2013, the major undertaking of *Holiday Lights* is to update the outdated incandescent lighting to energy efficient LEDs.
- The Southwest ITBEC sponsored the **Rural Empty Storefront Conference**. 7 Rivers Alliance hosted a 'Rural Empty Storefront Conference' in Cashton, Wisconsin last November. Attendees were able to hear proven strategies from experienced local and national speakers to spark ideas to fill empty storefronts in their communities. These strategies included discovering actionable holistic solutions, getting the latest on national trends, learning best practices, and hearing success stories from other communities like theirs.
- Southwest ITBEC made a \$500 contribution to the Tomah Arts Guild as seed monies to help start the **Tomah Art Walk**. This 2016 event features paintings, ceramics, sculptures, jewelry, mixed media, fine crafts and working artists from around the region. The **Tomah Art Walk** is a juried, fine arts event to promote the arts in southwest and central Wisconsin. The celebration of arts will lead you along Tomah's beautiful and scenic recreation trail that winds along the Lemonweir River and Lake Tomah.
- The Southwest ITBEC was proud to be a sponsor again in 2016, as we also did in the last three years, of the **Monroe County Economic Development Conference** summit held this past February. Over 200 attendees from 14 different counties attended the one day event. 31 exhibitors also took part in the Conference.
- For the second year in a row, Southwest ITBEC provided member Counties with funds to financially assist them in attending sports shows of their choice. A presence at these sports shows gives the members the opportunity to showcase the beauty and diversity of the best of Wisconsin -- highlighting cultural attractions, events, scenery, outdoor recreation, agriculture, and heritage of the southwestern corner of the state.

- The Southwest ITBEC made a \$2,500 grant to the **“Will to Ben” Bike Tour**. The goal of the project is to increase bicycling in the Driftless Region from out-of-state vacationers and to get vacationers to continue to come back after the event. The word of mouth of their experience increase bicyclists coming to the area as a choice destination. The plan is to develop a relationship with participating communities and make this an annual event with over least 2,000 participants within five years. This year they anticipate at over 100 bicyclists to join in. The primary target market will be bicyclists from Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.
- The Southwest ITBEC contributed \$2,000 towards the **Village of Ontario** community center restroom remodeling and upgrades. The Ontario Community Hall is not only the center of community activities but also draws visitors for concerts, wedding receptions and other events. In 2015 the village and volunteer organizations worked together to build an addition to what was a very small and inadequate kitchen. The kitchen is now state of the art, with new appliances, wall and floor coverings, new cabinets, counter tops and features of a commercial kitchen. The restroom project includes new plumbing fixtures and renovated floors, walls, ceiling and new doors. The close proximity to the Kickapoo River makes Ontario the "Canoe Capital of the Kickapoo" and means visitors looking for modern facilities.
- The Tomah Rotary Club received funding for their 2015/2016 **“Light up the Night!** holiday lights project in Tomah’s Winnebago Park through a grant from the Southwest ITBEC.
- The Southwest ITBEC has continued its membership in the **Wisconsin Agriculture Tourism Association** since 2011. The Wisconsin Agricultural Tourism Association promotes and preserves the rural lifestyle, fosters partnership opportunities within the ag-tourism community, and provides tools which encourage sustainable economic growth while creating awareness of Wisconsin agriculture.
- The Southwest ITBEC was a sponsor of the **Rural Workforce Housing Summit** hosted by 7 Rivers Alliance. The **Rural Workforce Housing Summit** brings together all the funding sources and information needed for launching successful workforce housing projects in rural communities. Sessions included “From Plan to Reality: Housing Success Stories from Leading Communities”, “Developer’s Panel: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Workforce Housing Partnerships”, “Show Me the Money! State and Federal Funding Available”, and “Bundling Public and Private Dollars to Support Housing Projects”. A lack of housing has been identified as one of the major stumbling blocks for prospective workers considering relocating to southwestern Wisconsin.
- The Southwest ITBEC provided funds to the **DeSoto Recreational Opportunities Committee** for the purchase of specialized hand tools to be used during the construction of a network of eight interconnected hiking trails. The Committee hopes to develop a system that will provide a safe and convenient resource for health and wellness in a natural setting that invites and connects both residents and visitors alike. The specialized hand tools are items not typically found in your home

gardening shed like square-nosed shovels, McLeod rakes, Pulaski axes, and mattock picks.

- The Southwest ITBEC has pledged \$500 as seed monies for the newly created **Bike Me Fun Ride** event. Their mission is to celebrate the Elroy-Sparta Bike Trail and the communities along the trail. Each year, a different one of the trail-side communities will be spotlighted to bring awareness to the tourists, the communities, and the economic impact in the area.
- The Southwest ITBEC maintains a website, www.southwestwisconsin.net. The website acts as a portal to the region and helps direct people to local government websites, economic development organizational websites, and tourism related websites.