

Universities aid local economy

BY DANA BRUXVOORT
Staff Reporter

Although the economic crisis has hit hard across the nation, the two universities in town might help Kirksville avoid the worst.

Marty Romitti, director of the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center, visited Kirksville last week to give local leaders a broad framework of the city's economic situation.

"Kirksville is uniquely positioned in terms of economic development possibilities," Romitti said. "[It] has a lot of assets in place to help it have a strong economy."

Romitti said the presence of Truman and A.T. Still University can work to the city's advantage during the economic downturn. He said Kirksville can capitalize on the quality of its educational institutions to promote its economy and better fare the crisis.

Despite this good news, Romitti said Kirksville inevitably will feel the consequences of the national economy.

"There is no way that the state of Missouri, or even a city like Kirksville, can really avoid what's going on in the broader marketplace," he said.

Romitti said unemployment in Adair County increased by 1.4 percent in the past year, and the current rate of unemployment is 5.7 percent. The state average increased 2.2 percent and now is 7 percent.

John Fougere, director of communications for the Missouri Department of Economic Development, said unemployment traditionally rises more slowly in northeast Missouri than in other parts of the state.

"In general, college towns tend to have lower than average unemployment rates, owing to the economic stability associated with higher education institutions," Fougere said.

He said Missouri manufacturing and construction industries have been hit hard, but health care and education sectors have shown more stability during the economic crisis and even have shown some employment gains.

Phil Tate, director of Kirksville Regional Economical Development, Inc., said universities in Kirksville are an important factor in some companies' decision to locate here.

One such company is the Human Identification Technologies Forensic DNA lab that K-REDI recently

recruited. The DNA lab will create a minimum of 100 new jobs during a five-year time period. Tate said the anticipated collaboration with Truman and A.T. Still was a crucial factor in the company's choice to establish itself in Kirksville.

Tate said that although the economic situation undoubtedly is affecting Kirksville, this area has coped better than other parts of the country.

"We know [the recession] is having an impact, there's no question about it, but comparatively speaking, we are not as bad [off] as the rest of the state of Missouri, and the state of Missouri is not as damaged as the entire country," Tate said.

Missouri has a very diverse economy, the fifth most diverse in the nation. It is a strong manufacturing state, but also boasts strong life science and agriculture businesses.

"Because of the conservative nature of our culture, we're not as prone to some of those wild swings that you see in some of the other parts of the country," Tate said.

He said he anticipates that because of Missouri's diversity and conservative disposition, the state won't feel the effects of the economic crisis as deeply as other regions of the country. Historically, the consequences of such crises have not had as significant of an effect on Missouri.

Tate said the Kirksville area already has experienced some layoffs and K-REDI has noticed other effects as well.

"There are just less expansions and attractions going on out there in the whole country," he said. "So that means we have less prospects. That makes our job more difficult."

Because of this, K-REDI has increased its focus on Kirksville's existing manufacturing base. It is doing all it can to maintain jobs and keep current companies healthy, Tate said.

"I can assure you it's much easier to retain jobs than it is to go out and try to create new ones," he said.

K-REDI also is trying to ensure that their companies are appreciated. If a company is entitled to a state incentive as a result of increasing its employment, Tate said K-REDI makes sure they receive such incentives.

"We're not neglecting or changing our efforts in attracting new companies, but we certainly are increasing our focus on doing everything we can for the companies that are here," he said.



Krista Goodman/Index

Firefighter EMT Snyder inspects the potential new truck. The Kirksville Fire Department will not have money for a new truck in the budget and hopes to obtain a grant to cover the cost.

Firefighters shop for new truck

BY SARAH SCOTT
Staff Reporter

Spending extra money makes more sense when that money goes to save lives and rescue kittens caught in trees.

The Kirksville Fire Department is considering adding a new truck to its fleet. The department will evaluate and test the truck and then decide whether to try to obtain the money to purchase it.

Kirksville Fire Chief Randy Behrens said the department is considering purchasing a demo truck, which was built in 2008 to show at expos. Behrens said this type of truck normally costs between \$491,000 and \$500,000 but the truck the department is considering is priced at \$259,000. The truck is an E-1 pumper, Behrens said. The current truck was purchased in 2002, but it goes on medical runs 600 to 700 times a year.

"It has the most miles on it, the most wear and tear on it," Behrens said.

Behrens said he first saw the new truck when it was being driven through Kirksville on its way to an expo.

"We looked at it, and the thought really didn't cross my mind about even being interested in it at the particular time because I know that I don't have money until October 2011," Behrens said.

The department won't have necessary funds until 2011 because it purchased a new truck last year. Behrens said the truck purchased last year was a ladder truck with the ability to reach 30 feet higher than the previous ladder truck. He said the department currently has two pumpers — the trucks that carry water — one pumper with a ladder and one aerial ladder truck.

Behrens said he will apply for an

Assistance to Firefighters grant to help pay for the new truck. The department received this federal grant last year and used it to purchase equipment like ropes and hoses.

"It's a grant, so you never know if it's going to happen, but it would help us move up the replacement schedule," Behrens said.

Money for trucks usually comes from a Kirksville capital tax put into place by the City Council. Behrens said the department usually is allotted \$100,000 per year to purchase fire trucks.

Behrens said that for five years, the money from the tax went toward paying for a factory that the council purchased in 2003, instead of the fire department, which put the department behind on the truck replacement schedule.

Kirksville Finance Director Laura Guy said the voters chose to extend the Capital Improvement sales tax indefinitely in April 2007. She said the budget for the fire department's equipment, including the truck purchased in 2008, comes from the tax and that the department will be eligible for a new truck in the fourth quarter of 2011.

A certain dollar amount of the Capital Improvement tax goes to the fire department, the airport, the parks and recreation department, general capital and other projects. Guy said the amount each entity receives is based on an estimate of \$600,000 per year.

"It's a rough estimate of what that brings in per year," Guy said. "Then so much can be allocated per year to each of those categories."

Fire Captain Joe Schilling said the old truck needs to be replaced.

"We've got a couple of pieces of

apparatus that are definitely getting to their age limit as far as service years ... [and] are starting to be pushed toward the 10-year limit," Schilling said. "This one would be replacing a truck that definitely needs replacing."

Schilling said the fact that the truck is a demo truck causes some problems because most trucks are built specifically for the department's need. He said that while the firefighters are borrowing the truck to test it out, they will measure for equipment shelving and mountings that are built in to the other truck.

"It's kind of a trial by error," Schilling said. "It's looking like it can be accommodated with a little bit of money and a little bit of ingenuity."

Schilling said the department would have to put mountings in to keep equipment from dropping, hitting against other equipment and bouncing.

"One of our worst problems is — as much as this truck runs — is having equipment just laying in there and it's jumping around and smacking around," Schilling said. "We're going to try to make sure we ... mount them and put them in places to where it's going to be better on the equipment and better on the truck overall."

Schilling said the fire chief and assistant chief have estimated that the addition of trays, mounting brackets and other equipment will cost an extra \$5,000.

"The overall cost, even with doing all that, it looks like this truck would be over a \$250,000 savings," Schilling said.

He said it appears that there will be enough compartment space to consider buying the truck, but the department will continue to test it for a few days.

United Way faces shortfall of 2009 budget goal, donors give less

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Staff Reporter

Tough times lie ahead, especially for those who need the most help.

The Adair County United Way fell 10 percent short of its goal for 2009, executive director Nancy Pennington said. The organization raised \$247,000 for 2009, \$27,000 short of last year, and the Kirksville community soon might see the effects of the shortfall as local nonprofits and charities that receive support from United Way trim their budgets.

The \$274,000 raised in 2008 prompted the organization to raise its campaign goal from \$270 thousand in 2008 to \$275 thousand in 2009.

"We're just not able to fund everything that we would like to be able to run," Pennington said.

She said the economic conditions probably were to blame for the lower funding. United Way collects 60 to 70 percent of its money from workplace campaigns that allow local workers to give funds from their paychecks. Many donors are giving less this year than they did during more stable economic times.

"When businesses are doing well there's no turnover — things are steady — then we are able to get more funds," Pennington said.

She said that despite the shortfall, United Way refuses to let the unhappy financial situation cripple the needs of the community. This year, United Way has shifted from giving lump sums to local nonprofits to funding specific programs within organizations. She said she anticipates this change to produce a more effective distribution of funds.

"We want to be able to address the most pressing needs of the community," she said. "[We want] to make the most impact on the most people. We want to be able to try to address root causes of issues."

United Way will focus its limited resources toward programs that create the greatest long-lasting change, Pennington said. For example, United Way did not fund the YMCA after-school program, since the program would cost \$21,000 to serve 50 children, and alternative after-school programs are available around town. However, other youth organizations received support because they affect more children for a much lower cost.

Program funding also will allow United Way to enable more communication and cooperation between local non-

profits, she said. Last year a needs assessment of community agencies revealed that more than one Adair organization serves the same purpose.

"We're trying to improve on the whole communication thing around the community [and] amongst agencies so everyone's not trying to all do the same thing and no one's really getting anything done," she said. "If we pool our efforts and work together we can be much more efficient."

Deane Valkenaar, executive director of North Central Missouri Red Cross, said two out of the three United Way funded Red Cross programs have suffered a decrease this year.

The financial strain poses additional problems since Adair's Red Cross program currently is expanding into seven surrounding counties. Valkenaar said he anticipates greater support from

these new counties as the Red Cross continues to provide services within the communities.

The Red Cross receives approximately 30 percent of its funding from United Way, which has a significant impact on the organization, he said. The current economic situation ultimately would have the greatest influence on how money will be raised and spent.

"United Way is doing the best they can, but it's tough times all the way around," he said. "Part of being a nonprofit is just looking for new sources of funding — it's the nature of the beast."

Brad Chambers, planned giving officer at Truman, co-chaired the 2008 and 2009 United Way campaigns at Truman. He said the campaign has kept its fundraising goal at \$56,000 since 2007 and has requested that United Way not raise the goal for 2010.

"With the recent volatility with the economy, we're anticipating that giving is going to become perhaps a little more difficult," Chambers said.

Truman's United Way campaign primarily focuses on faculty and staff, so the current hiring freeze will result in an identical or even decreased donor base for 2010. However, Chambers said he believes that the Truman community will pull through the economic crisis to meet the campaign goal.

"I think in times of economic difficulty, people rise to the challenge and support organizations and charities that meet the needs of our most fragile citizens," he said. "I have a lot of confidence in Truman faculty, staff, students — that they will step up, and they will meet that goal to ensure that those services are fully funded."

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