

Western Iowa Advantage is a collaborative group of economic development officials in Audubon, Calhoun, Carroll, Crawford, Greene, Ida, and Sac Counties.

WIAD Partners Tour RVP~1875

Robby Pedersen, owner of RVP-1875 led the tour for the group. RVP~1875 is the world's leading historical furniture shop and museum, and is located in the century-old Milligan Lumber Grain & Coal building in Jefferson. Pedersen is a Master Furniture Maker with over 28 years of experience, who has built over 1300 pieces of historically accurate furniture using only the tools, techniques and finishes used in 1875 Iowa.

On display in RVP-1875 is one of the largest working sets of 19th Century woodworking tools. The shop features an 1860's foot-powered lathe, an 1870's hand-crank ripsaw, and over 650 different hand planes. The showroom displays over 130 pieces of Robby's prototype furniture, each with a story of historical significance. RVP~1875 has been named 2013 Outstanding Tourism Business and 2015 Outstanding Retail Experience and 2016 Outstanding Tourism Attractions in the State of Iowa by the Iowa Tourism Office and the Travel Federation of Iowa!

Robby Pedersen started History Boy Theatre Company in the summer of 2009. Pedersen is striving for high quality theatre and choosing shows that might not normally be done in smaller cities. The 120 seat theatre is built into the back warehouse portion of his Historical Furniture Shop & Museum for a unique one of a kind experience.



PRESS RELEASE:**Landus and AMVC Partner to Build New Feed Mill in Hamlin**

Landus, Iowa's largest farmer-owned cooperative, and AMVC, the ninth-largest pork producer in the United States, announced collaborative plans to build a new feed mill at the existing Landus grain facility located in Hamlin, Iowa.



Through this partnership, AMVC will own and operate the feed mill. Landus will be responsible for originating grain for the project through its network of local farmer-owners.

“We are proud to demonstrate the power of partnership as we introduce this collaborative model to the local feed landscape. By working together from the start, Landus and AMVC have developed an optimized approach that allows each party to focus on its strengths while better meeting the unique needs of our differing stakeholders. This improved model gives AMVC better control of their long-term biosecurity and traceability requirements, while Landus can focus on sourcing and delivering quality grain from our farmer-owners. By working together, we can both responsibly invest where it makes the most sense; for Landus that means using farmer-owner money in the most effective way possible,” said Matt Carstens, President and CEO of Landus.

The proposed feed mill will produce up to 400,000 tons of swine feed per year. It will generate demand for roughly 8.5 million bushels of corn, and 48,000 tons of soybean meal annually. Corn demand will exceed the capacity of the existing Landus grain storage in Hamlin, allowing Landus the opportunity to leverage its nearby grain assets, including a site in Panora, Iowa, which was recently acquired through an asset swap with Heartland Co-op, to supply corn to the new mill.

“AMVC is excited to align with Landus, a like-minded agriculture organization committed to enhancing our rural economies. Landus will provide AMVC the expertise to source and deliver quality grain from local farmers, allowing us to better leverage our strengths of professionally raising and feeding pigs. The establishment of this feed mill will maintain and increase long-term agriculture value for crop producers and pork producer stakeholders within Audubon County. This partnership also adds to the overall economic growth of the community by creating short and long-term employment opportunities. For over 30 years, AMVC has been committed to investing in livestock production and animal wellbeing. This investment furthers our pursuit to feed the world through our local communities,” said Dr. Steve Schmitz, veterinarian and managing partner at AMVC.

Once fully operational, the mill will employ up to eight full-time personnel and generate demand for an additional 14 local truck drivers. AMVC currently anticipates project completion by Summer 2024. Additional updates will be provided to the public as this project progresses.

About AMVC

AMVC is a progressive, diversified agribusiness committed to improving livestock production and animal wellbeing. We provide livestock producers with management, veterinary, nutritional, marketing, administrative, human resources, and facility construction expertise. To learn more about AMVC, visit amvcms.com.

About Landus

Landus is a farmer-owned agricultural cooperative headquartered in Ames, Iowa. The cooperative employs about 600 full-time employees at locations in more than 60 communities to serve over 7,000 farmer-owners. Landus is Iowa's largest agricultural cooperative providing unmatched scale, expertise, facilities, and logistics. Products and services span the five pillars of agronomy, grain, feed, animal nutrition, and data. For information visit: landuscooperative.com.

*PRESS RELEASE:***BEST of Iowa identifies workforce challenges as major hurdle to business expansion**

Ongoing workforce issues are challenging Iowa companies, preventing some from moving forward on expansion projects.

Those workforce limitations and other trends, including supply chain issues and economic uncertainty, were identified in the 2021 Business Expansion and Strategic Trends (BEST) of Iowa report. Based on data collected during interviews with 1,065 companies in 66 Iowa counties, the BEST report depends heavily on community groups that step forward to conduct the interviews. Four of those groups were honored with Best of Iowa Excellence Awards for their work collecting the 2021 data. They are:

- City of Boone
- Iowa City Area Development
- Mahaska Chamber & Development Group and Mahaska County
- City of Urbandale

“These organizations show a tremendous commitment to supporting their local businesses and the BEST program,” says Drew Conrad, Director at the Institute for Decision Making, The University of Northern Iowa. “Without their help, this important report would not be possible.”

BEST of Iowa is a statewide business retention and expansion program, created and overseen by a management team made up of representative from Iowa Economic Development Authority, Alliant Energy, Black Hills Energy, Iowa Area Development Group and MidAmerican Energy with a focus on identifying business trends and growing the state’s economy. BEST is a national model for using existing business data collected through Synchronist PRIME® interviews with local employers.

In the 2021 report, 40.5% of the companies interviewed identified a difficulty finding employees as the top economic recovery barrier after the challenges of the pandemic. The workforce trend was most often reported by companies in the construction, health care and social services, wholesale trade and manufacturing industry sectors.

In the last six months, 221 companies reported a loss of high-value employees and nearly 70% of 668 companies reported an overall challenge in recruiting qualified workers.

Despite those challenges, many of the companies interviewed continue to move forward with business expansions. Nearly 48% of the companies interviewed stated that before the COVID pandemic, their company had expansion plans, with 89.6% indicating those plans were an expansion and 10.4% were a renovation. Almost 71% stated their plans are moving forward, however 15.7% stated their expansion plans are temporarily on hold and 12.3% are uncertain their expansion plans will move forward.

Among the companies still planning expansions, 75.3% reported workforce recruitment problems.

Nearly 34% of companies interviewed reported supply chain issues as a hinderance to economic recovery with the construction sector facing the most difficulty. Businesses in the professional, scientific and technical services reported economic uncertainty as creating the most barriers to their business recovery plans.

“The information gathered in the BEST report is critical to understanding the needs and challenges of the business sector in Iowa and how to best address them,” says Conrad. “By shining a light on the issues affecting them, we can better formulate programs and policies to help our businesses thrive.”

For more details about the study, visit iowaeda.com/best-of-iowa.

Laborshed Studies to be conducted throughout the region

County Economic Developers are partnering with Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) and Iowa Economic Development Authority to complete a Laborshed employment study for the area. This study will geographically define which communities contribute to each city's workforce, regardless of political boundaries. This defined area is called a Laborshed area and is based upon commuting patterns.

The purpose of this Laborshed study is to measure the availability and characteristics of area workers. Laborshed studies are useful tools for economic development teams and existing or prospective employers to understand the local labor market, make informed expansion and site selection decisions, and maintain/recruit a high quality workforce.

For the success of this study, letters will be sent to randomly selected households asking residents to take a confidential online survey. Survey questions will cover topics such as: employment status, current and desired wages, current and desired benefits, education level, and type of occupation, among other things. However, Iowa Workforce Development will not be asking survey takers identifiable information such as: name, social security number, or date of birth. Participation in this workforce study is greatly appreciated regardless of employment status whether you are currently employed, unemployed, a homemaker, retired, etc. Your input is highly valued.

Following the conclusion of the online surveying efforts IWD will conduct telephone surveying in the area through a third-party vendor. The survey call originates out of Missouri and the incoming number will have the 573 area code. The same survey questions asked in the online survey will be asked of those who participate in the survey on the phone and again, no identifying information will be collected. All the survey answers collected will be combined and reported together. Individual answers are completely confidential.

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