CREATING YOUR OWN DIGITAL ECONOMY WITH THE HELP OF PARTNERSHIPS
"We created this book to bring together community and economic development researchers, practitioners, philanthropists and others to showcase the great work happening across this country and to outline a framework for conducting community and economic development that, if applied, can help more communities achieve shared economic prosperity. Our goal for this book is to help inform rural development stakeholders how initiatives at the local, state and federal level can support the achievement of broad-based, long-term economic opportunity in rural communities, especially historically challenged areas. Rural areas face a unique set of challenges, but their contributions to our nation’s economy are also important and provide incentive for developing a better understanding of how to create better opportunities for rural households, businesses and communities."

Source:

"The one commonality that connects all the stories in the book is that no one is doing this work alone. The public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors all have a role to play and must work together to support rural communities as they seek to move forward. Many of the chapters make recommendations for what those roles should be for these different stakeholders and what actions they can take to improve our collective likelihood of fostering shared economic prosperity in rural America."

Source:
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Illinois

Population Est. 2020..................................................28,288
Population Est. 2010..................................................30,104
Total housing units..................................................12,511
Households with a computer 2017-2021..............86%
Households with broadband 2017-2021..............80%
High school graduate or higher (age 25+)...........88%
Bachelor's degree or higher (age 25+)...............18%
Persons in poverty.....................................................13%
Total square miles......................................................703
Total employer establishments (2020)..............681

*numbers are rounded to remove decimals

Sources:
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/montgomerycountyillinois
https://data.canary.census.gov/profile/Montgomery_County_Illinois?q=0500000US17135
BACKGROUND ON CLOSING OUR DIGITAL DIVIDE

NEEDING SPEED AND BANDWIDTH

Business retention visits by MCEDC identified severe problems with internet speed and bandwidth throughout the county.

PLAN 1...PLAN 2...PLAN 3
....PLAN 4....PLAN Z.

- Funding issues
- Topography issues
- Community confusion
- Misinformation
- Retaliatory campaigns
- Technology needs growing

ATTRACTING A PROVIDER

- Collecting accurate data
- Creating a case for business profitability
- Educating the community
- Physically getting pre-signups
ONE ORGANIZATION, OR GOVERNMENT BODY, COULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS AMOUNT OF WORK ALONE.

MCEDC had foresight, stirred up community buy-in, and was relentless.

UI Extension had capacity to educate the community to make sure MCEDC's goal, purpose and insight for broadband expansion was truly understood. Extension also had the capability to provide project consulting to MCEDC and manage the many moving pieces of project development.

Montgomery County and municipal governments allowed MCEDC and Extension to share project updates with elected and appointed officials.

Local chambers of commerce, non-profits, business leaders and schools welcomed MCEDC and Extension to meetings to share project need and drum up project support.
MCEDC AND U OF I EXTENSION STARTED ASKING THE NEXT QUESTIONS....

- How do we plan for our changing economy?
- How do we leverage this asset to create exponential growth?
- How can we utilize this new infrastructure to curb brain drain, increase economic possibilities, and create equitable opportunity for personal financial growth?
- What steps do we need to take to support change in a rural community with generational gaps and misunderstandings?
32ND ANNUAL RURAL COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE (2021)

Strategies for a New Normal

“A Rural Renaissance: How Small Towns Across the Country Are Developing Thriving Digital Economy Ecosystems”
Matt Dunne, Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)

Rural communities face unique economic development challenges. Matt Dunne, Founder and Executive Director of the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), shares how his organization supports rural communities, as they navigate challenges and build thriving digital economy ecosystems that support innovation, entrepreneurship, and local job creation. Learn about the five drivers of CORI’s economic development model, as well as learning how local leaders can leverage these drivers to develop holistic strategies that will help to bring greater prosperity and economic opportunity to their own hometowns.

Sources:
https://ruralinnovation.us/
"While it might be thought that traditional, competitive development activities are used to the exclusion of alternative strategies, or vice versa, the most-active counties today use a mix of the two strategies."

"Arts-based community development—sometimes termed “creative place-making programs”—has been increasingly advocated for rural areas. However, only 18% of remote rural counties and 26% of adjacent rural counties have such programs in place, compared to 34% of metro counties. Yet rural counties are likely to have greater need for such programs because they tend to have overall poorer economic conditions."

"Entrepreneurs help economies evolve—globally, nationally and locally. They combine the factors of production—land, labor, capital and technology—in new and innovative ways. The future of the rural economy will come from within rural America itself, and entrepreneurs will shepherd it in."

WHY CORI? TO PUT US ON THE MAP!

The Center on Rural Innovation helps rural towns across the country become strategic about economic development in the 21st century. They know that the barriers facing rural communities are multidimensional, so they bring a comprehensive range of expertise, programs, and partnerships to the table to ensure that all Americans, regardless of geography, are connected online and able to participate in a 21st century tech economy.

- successful model that identifies current assets, opportunities, gaps, and challenges
- economic data analysis and interviews with community stakeholders and partners
- partnerships with rural communities for shared learning and broader cross-pollination of ideas
- assistance in relationship building with other rural communities who are building digital economies
Individual organizations or government bodies in Montgomery County, did not have the capacity to participate in the CORI studies on their own. This gave us another opportunity to work together to take part in CORI's mapping and planning process so we could learn how to utilize our fiber infrastructure and create a digital economy.

UI Extension took the lead to map out our community resources and create a team that could work with the CORI team and grow relationships nationally.
CORI PHASE I & II COMPLETED

- Data was collected and our assets identified and outlined.
- Mapping strategy and partners have been outlined.
- We are ready to begin the implementation of our 5-year plan.

This was all possible because our community educators, nonprofits, government bodies, and leaders choose to work together to search out opportunities, build capacity, and plan for our future.
No two plans will take the same path
Search out shared experiences and failures
  • do not reinvent the wheel
The project leader must be able to manage/contain/restrain
  • be ready to build on strengths and curb negative behavior
Educate your community on economic development
  • changes is not immediate
  • economic development takes time

Shop now: https://www.atlas46.com/products.html
VALUABLE GUIDANCE

- Stay stubborn
- Seek out educational opportunities
  - IIRA Conference
- Search for data, answers, opinions, strategies, and advice
  - "Investing in Rural Prosperity" by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System
- Embrace the "non-traditional"
  - cookie cutter plans do not address the specific needs of your community
Prepare for rejection and resistance
Put ego's aside and the community first
Find your community influencers and make them your promoters
Build relationships with existing businesses
  - BRV's (business retention visits)
  - ask for input and advice
Engage those who have been disregarded and overlooked
Involve local banks in the planning process
Encourage regional collaboration

VALUABLE GUIDANCE

Shop online at: https://www.blackboardmercantile.com/
Technology, innovation, and the digital economy is developing rapidly.

Creating a digital economy requires:

- infrastructure,
- time,
- relationship building,
- education,
- acceptance of adaptation,
- willingness,
- and tenacity.

VALUABLE GUIDANCE

https://shagsvintage.com/
THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO IS HELPING MOVE MONTGOMERY COUNTY FORWARD:

These are not listed in any particular order.

- Lt. Governor Julia Stratton and the Governor’s Rural Affairs Council
- Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs & Chris Merrett
- Western Illinois University, Norm Walzer, and Sandy Wittig
- Adam Vocks and Billy Williams, previous owners of CTI
- Heather Hampton+Knodle
- Jodi Reynolds and Montgomery CEO
- Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation
- City of Hillsboro, Mayor Don Downs and Sarah McConnell
- Jonathan Weyer
- Lincoln Land Community College and Jessie Blackburn
- Montgomery County former Chairperson, Evan Young and current Chairperson Doug Donnellson
- U of I Extension Community and Economic Development
- CORI (Center on Rural Innovation)
- To the leadership in the following towns and villages: Hillsboro, Taylor Springs, Schram City, Nokomis, Coalton, Wenonah, Litchfield, Witt, Irving, Coffeen, Raymond, and Fillmore.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PROJECTS AND PARTNERS

- CORI (Center on Rural Innovation)
  https://ruralinnovation.us/
- SCI Center - Litchfield, IL
- The COOP
  https://thehilltopcoop.com/
- Montgomery CEO
  https://www.montgomeryceo.com/
- Midland Institute for Entrepreneurship
  https://www.midlandinstitute.com/
- University of Illinois Extension CED Team
  https://extension.illinois.edu/global/community-economic-development
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