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## Tour Local Business and Host Economic Roundtable

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs, ease of operations and marketing were on the minds of area businesses owners while Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation CEO Paul

By: Margaret Ontl, Hudson Star-Observer

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs, ease of operations and marketing were on the minds of area businesses owners while Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation CEO Paul Jadin was in Western Wisconsin on Friday at the invitation of State Senator Sheila Harsdorf.

Harsdorf and Jadin, along with State Representative Dean Knudson (R-Hudson) and local economic development coordinators, toured Interfacial Solutions, a materials science company in River Falls that provides services in the plastics industry. Afterwards, Harsdorf and Jadin, along with Representative Knudson and State Representative John Murtha (R-Baldwin), hosted an economic roundtable with local business leaders at J & L Steel & Electrical Services, a Hudson company that provides construction services in the region.

The roundtable provided Jadin and Harsdorf the opportunity to hear directly from area business leaders about important economic and business issues in Western Wisconsin.

Jadin was appointed Secretary of Commerce last December and became the CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) when it was created earlier this year. The WEDC is the state's leading economic development agency. Jadin has been working to get the WEDC moving forward with its mission to assist with job creation and economic development. Created as a public authority, the WEDC is responsible for economic development activities previously administered by the former Department of Commerce, which was eliminated on July 1, 2011.

He comes to the job with a proven record, having led economic development efforts that provided a 50 percent increase in tax base during his two terms as mayor of Green Bay Wisconsin from 1995 to 2003. Subsequently he was the president and CEO of the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, which had 1,400 members employing 93,000 workers.

"We are here to get an update from President Jadin on how the transition from the commerce to the new WEDC is going," said Senator Sheila Harsdorf during her introduction. "We know in order to turn our economy around it is essential that we have jobs created. It is the key to growing our economy."

"The first myth I want to dispel is the corporation being the answer to all our troubles at Commerce," said Jadin. "Being a corporation will make us more nimble and more responsive." The Wisconsin Department of Commerce had 393 employees.

"We are eliminating all of those regulatory functions. Two-thirds of them (the employees) will be going over to the department of safety and professional services so we are going to be 100 percent focused on economic development."

Jadin, went on to describe the new structure of the WEDC. Starting with 55 employees, they will be hiring 30 more growing total to 85.

The fact that we are going to be funded like our peers are funded is huge. Jadin stated that last year the state spent only \$22,000 on marketing compared the marketing budgets in the millions in neighboring states.

"Moving forward the WEDC will begin with a million dollars for marketing that will be matched with four million from the private sector," said Jadin. "This means a five million dollar budget for marketing."

"When I talked to my predecessors over the last eight years their hands were tied," said Jadin. "We are competing with the states of Illinois, Minnesota and Michigan."

"We are going to have an opportunity to make a difference because of these four reasons the WEDC is properly organized, it has a reasonable budget, being a new corporation that is more responsive and agile and 100 percent focused on job creation," said Jadin.

The second myth addressed by Jadin was:

"All we are doing at WEDC is around trying to steal jobs from other states. If you look at our charge of 250,000 jobs I would submit to you that well over 200,000 are going to come from the state of Wisconsin organically grown either that are going to give birth to those businesses and grow them through nascent stage to the growth stage or we are going to take our existing corporations and going to allow them to expand significantly, because the governor and this legislature is making it easier for those businesses to expand by eliminating the regulatory burdens, by freezing or reducing taxes and in general providing more assistance.

It is going to be a focus on growing what we have and giving birth to new businesses and then of course yes there will be that arm of the corporation is going to make it easier for folks from Minnesota and Illinois to move across the border and to reach beyond our borders to invite them to take advantage of this new business climate the governor and legislature has allowed us to create and will continue to improve."

"We will be more responsive and more transparent than the commerce department has ever been," continued Jadin. "And we going to be able to do more that commerce has ever done with the new Entrepreneur and Innovation divisions."

The WEDC is made up of a thirteen person board that chaired by the governor, four legislators, two from each house and two from each party and eight private sector members. There will be seven or eight regions with an average of ten counties in each.

Jadin, Harsdorf, Knudsen and Murtha listened to participants for nearly an hour as they shared insights and asked questions regarding the present business climate in the state.

Steve Weinzierl, of Engineered Propulsion Systems, a start-up company in New Richmond, said thanks to a \$600,000 grant from the state they were within six months of starting comprehensive tests on a new engine.

Weinzierl also indicated that the company, would like to benefit from engineering expertise from outside the United States, specifically Germany, however, lawyer's fees and immigration hurdles made that difficult.

"In Europe they take a different philosophical approach. To be a professor in engineering you must have ten years of practical experience," said Weinzierl. "It is more of an apprenticeship approach. In the United States a student can go right through to teach at the college level with little or no practical application of the knowledge. Thus finding the level of expertise we want for our project has been difficult."

Paul Meyer of the New Richmond Economic Development Corporation indicated he has a number of possible companies that have expressed an interest.

"We need a single point of reference," said Meyer. "We are never quite sure if we have the whole picture."

"If there was one thing you could tell me you want from the WEDC what would it be," asked Jadin, of the 20 participants in the roundtable.

The responses included, "We have to project a better business image," said Weinzierl.

"I think we need to be more responsive," said Bill Rubin, St. Croix County Economic Development Director. "No model is perfect. If this is going to work being responsive is absolutely necessary."

"The WEDC is prepared to provide businesses with the assistance they need to expand and create jobs for Wisconsin workers," said Jadin in closing. "It's crucial that we hear directly from employers to understand what barriers we can address and what opportunities we can take advantage of to help them prosper."

On hand for the meeting were Quentin Schultz, Bio Diagnostics Inc.; Steve Weinzierl, Engineered Propulsion Systems; Lou Anne Berg, J&LSteel & Electrical; Trudy Popenhagen, Xcel Energy; Bill Warner, Pierce County EDC; Steve Healy, Polk County EDC; Bill Rubin, St. Croix County EDC; Paul Mayer, New Richmond Area EDC; Colleen Hammer, ImmunoStar; Jeff Warren, Divine Custom Homes; Mark St. Michel, Fiberstar, Inc.; Sharon Seibel, J&S Machine; Joe Seibel, J&S Machine; Tim Dove, R&R Specialties; Chris Pope, Preco, Inc.; John Danneker, The Window Technicians; Paul Bauer, Ellsworth Creamery, Jim Hauschild, OEM Fabricators; Ron Bartlels, Jared Matzek, Thomas & Belts (Hager City); Steve Metcalf, Air Motion Systems and Kim Heinemann, Hudson Chamber.

"Listening to local business owners is an important step in creating jobs and moving Wisconsin forward economically," says Harsdorf, "It is vitally important that Wisconsin cultivate a climate that is favorable to job creation."

Hosting the group was Lou Anne Berg, owner of J&L Steel and Electrical Services.

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From the left are Lou Anne Berg, J&L Steel and Electrical Services, Chris Pope, Preco, Inc.; Steve Healy, Polk County Economic Development, WEDC, CEO and president Paul Jadin and Senator Sheila Harsdorf