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Q&A with Bill Andrew, president of the Greater Kent Committee

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Greater Kent Committee president Bill Andrew recently spoke with Kent County Sunday about the Kent County Business Development Roundtable and why it's needed.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A condensed version of this interview appears in the Oct. 19 issue of Kent County SUNDAY. To view an interactive map with links to additional articles about the five projects highlighted by the Kent County Business Development Roundtable, click [here](#).

In 2013, members of the Greater Kent Committee decided it was time to take economic development for the county into their own hands by developing the Kent County Business Development Roundtable.

The roundtable was created with a hope of not only uniting the towns but to strengthen the economic development forces within the county to improve the life of residents and bring businesses to the county. The first project for the roundtable was identifying projects within the towns to help promote Kent County. These five projects are the Route 13 Corridor Study in Smyrna, expanding the cargo ramp at Dover Air Force Base, water projects in Milford, improving drinking water in Harrington, and the Garrison Oak Technical Park in Dover.

Since these five projects were announced, the roundtable has also been busy moving forward with other economic development initiatives including identifying commercial properties available in business parks throughout the county.

Greater Kent Committee president Bill Andrew recently spoke with Kent County Sunday about the roundtable and why it's needed.

Q How did the Business Development Roundtable for the Greater Kent Committee come about?

A We saw that there was a need to try and synchronize all of the economic development activity throughout the county that we knew of, and we knew of a lot of economic development professionals within each of the towns and the county. We knew that they were not routinely speaking with each other. We knew it'd be better to hear five voices talking as one rather than one voice talking five times so we developed a concept, a consolidated plan for the entire county to support each of the community projects, any economic development project within Kent County to make Kent County a much better place to live, work, and play.

All of the economic development professionals from the towns in Kent County whether it's an economic development officer, a town manager or a council member work together to speak in harmony about the area to help businesses and interested individuals understand the resources available. Anyone of those five professionals in those towns can now sing the praises of the other towns and provide opportunities for economic development. We want a harmonious message ... that's what we're hoping to do.

We developed the plan and called the groups together and asked if they would work with us. We developed a video highlighting projects in each area, then went and visited each of the responsible groups – Smyrna Town Council, City of Dover, City of Harrington, City of Milford, and Kent County Levy Court – and we sought approval from each. The video was developed using internal resources from the Greater Kent Committee. Jeremy Tucker, the communications manager for the Delaware Electric Cooperative, produced and developed the video. In the Greater Kent Committee we share a lot of resources back and forth all the time, especially for the good of the public.

Each organization signed up in support of the concept and in support of the projects. Now we have a continuing process of supporting the economic wellbeing of the entire county by communicating across all lines, across city territorial lines to try and make sure that all opportunities are capitalized on.

An example is the City of Smyrna being able to capture some grants for water and sewer projects within Smyrna, and the city sharing the process with the City of Harrington and other cities to allow them to be able to improve their position with their projects. Smyrna also gave the information to Milford but unfortunately their economic development person has left so we're waiting for a new one to start work.

Q How were the roundtable members chosen?

A With the roundtable part of the Economic Development Committee, we solicited all the local towns and asked if they wanted to participate and if they wanted to have their economic development professionals or city managers be a part of this. We engaged them as part of the committee and now it's really more about the economic development professionals in the community, towns, and county such as Jim Waddington [economic development director for the Kent Economic Partnership] and from Greater Kent Committee to work specifically to keep the coordination going among everybody.

Q What are the roundtable's ultimate goals?

A The ultimate goal of the roundtable is to number one – promote economic development throughout the county and allow us not to miss any opportunity and make sure we're communicating properly across all lines to make sure we enhance our ability to attract more jobs and businesses throughout the area.

Right now we're promoting to any outside business that comes through the Delaware Economic Development Office with the state. We promote it to the existing businesses and industrial parks. For example, the Economic Development Committee presented at the Kent Plant Manager's Association meeting recently promoting the available industrial properties within Kent County. It's not just one group we're focused on. We're promoting the county to perspective new businesses coming to the area and the existing businesses are coming together to support the economic development partnership with the state of Delaware.

We don't have the number of jobs and businesses the roundtable has helped bring in because that's not our focus. We focus on the opportunity and are catalytic in the process of putting businesses and job perspectives with the county professionals. We just make sure people are talking to the

right people and want to make sure that all the economic development professionals throughout the county are talking with each other. Our focus is not only in bringing jobs in but in keeping jobs here.

Q How were these five projects selected?

A We look at this as a living document, a living project where as opportunities arise or as opportunities are capitalized on we can move different projects in and out of the cue to best meet the needs of the county and the towns. For example, the next step was locating commercial property in industrial parks. We met with local plant managers to let them know if they needed to expand, could expand or knew of someone else who wanted to expand and wanted to come to Kent County where commercial properties are available so they could segue right into the opportunity. There are several properties in the county available including three or four in Smyrna, three or four in Dover, and some in Harrington.

So it's a living document. We're not just looking at those five projects but at how best to meet the needs of everybody. As projects are completed we'll move on to another one or an infrastructure project that will have many applications such as the cargo ramp at Dover Air Force Base and being able to utilize that to support DAFB's mission, creating new jobs, and saving money for other businesses associated with it by providing reduced cost or by supporting ancillary business opportunities to support the main mission. We're trying to leverage communication and embrace all the opportunities for economic development throughout the entire county.

The roundtable's involvement with the projects is to help promote them and get them started. We helped Harrington get the resources they needed to improve the drinking water in town such as the loans and grants and then promote that they have great water. Once the project is started, we move on to other projects. These are long term processes. It's not about the wins and losses, but the overall improvement of the economic capabilities of the towns.

Q What can the committee do to make a real impact on getting these projects underway?

A Once the project gets started, we basically pass it off to the local entity. We're acting more as a catalyst in order to get projects off the ground and are well advertised throughout the entire community to make sure we find the best fit for businesses in the community. Once a project gets

started, we basically move away from that and tackle some other project that we can help move on. We are facilitators there to make it happen. We don't own any of the projects; we're not the experts of the project. We just want to put the businesses in touch with the economic development leaders in the community and make sure all economic development leaders within the community are well versed in all the opportunities throughout the county. We want towns to be able to say if something can't happen in Dover, why not in Smyrna or Milford, Harrington or Camden. We have a special place and we're always working with several groups not only the Kent Economic Partnership but each town's organization whether it's a council or town manager to help promote the county as a whole.

When it comes to promoting the county, the business roundtable does not deal directly with businesses once they come to the area. We promote the communication and the sharing of information with the economic development professionals throughout the county. We will go and support businesses when asked, but we mainly talk to the economic development professionals in the area as a whole because our goal is for the communication to be better and that's what we're doing. We want people to come in and say, "Wow [Smyrna Town Manager] Dave Hugg is talking to [Kent Economic Partnership Director] Jim Waddington and [Dover Economic Development Director] Bill Neaton, who's talking to the electric companies and phone companies and gas companies bringing in all those resources together. Wow." It makes it a lot easier for the potential company to grow in Kent County because it's a much easier transition. We're not actively seeking individual customers but we're actively promoting the economic abilities in Kent County.

Q How will the roundtable evaluate whether or not it was successful?

A There are different ways to measure if we're successful. Everybody wants to hit a homerun, for a new business to come to town but if we can have local economic development professionals talking to each other, we're already a success. When we have Kent County moving together as a team – as a whole – we're successful. When we can do those two things eventually we will bring success to the county. When we're able to bring more jobs and more businesses, then we'll be able to measure true success.

We don't have any quantifiable measures of success but we have provided opportunities to make it easier for jobs and people to expand in Kent County.

Q What are you working on next?

A We're always looking for new projects that can fit into the county that will provide jobs and business opportunities. We do not limit ourselves to one, two or ten [projects] a year. We're out there to help whenever and wherever we are needed.

We're currently discussing and working on bringing in an entire new agency to promote tourism. It's not necessarily tourism but we want to promote Kent County once again and engage our business development roundtable into the process in order to keep existing businesses in the county. These ideas won't happen overnight but they're good ideas.

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