



New executive director at Greencastle-Antrim Chamber of Commerce has a slew of goals

By **MARCUS RAUHUT** Staff writer

GREENCASTLE -- Joel Fridgen began his new role last week as the executive director of the Greencastle-Antrim Chamber of Commerce.

Public Opinion met with Fridgen last week to talk about his goals, the challenges of the economic downturn, and the future of economic development in the Greencastle area.

Why did you want to become the chamber director?

"First of all, I have a background in business. I enjoy networking and interacting with people and I've had experience working with organizations like the chamber of commerce. I've been involved with civic and community organizations in the past, and I've enjoyed that. I thought my background was a good fit with what the chamber might be looking for.

"Secondly, I want to make a difference. I'm a servant leader at heart. By definition, what a servant leader is: You're trying to contribute and make a difference, enriching the lives of others you come in contact with. It's a unique position in that I come in contact with 337 of our members,

and I can be a resource for them as they have needs."

What are your goals as chamber director?

"First and foremost is to work with Heritage Christmas. The committee has done a great job of planning that event and we just need to go through the execution. That's one of my immediate goals.

"In terms of longer-term goals, I want to get to know the board members and be exposed to the members and then we'll arrive at those goals.

"Certainly the one important goal is to visit members the first year. I think secondly, as we look at the future, we want to be clear about our mission as a chamber.

"We're in this together as executive director and board and we're moving in the same direction. We're going to get there as an organization and I'm excited about that. I think there's tremendous potential for the Greencastle-Antrim Chamber of Commerce to contribute to a vibrant business community here that will meet the needs of the people in our area, as well as focus on the heritage."

The new Norfolk Southern terminal will have a major impact on economic development in Greencastle. What is the chamber's role in this development?

"The chamber's role is first and foremost to be a resource and to facilitate communication with

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the different entities. One of the things I hope we can do -- and this has not been confirmed -- is I hope we can invite a Norfolk Southern representative to a chamber breakfast and expose them to the business community.

"Anything that we can do to help coordinate or be a point of contact to get people together is where I see our role in economic development. Certainly there will be businesses that will want to form or expand as we look ahead. I want them to be able to feel like they can go to the chamber and (we can say) "OK, these are the people you need to see," or be that hub.

"We can't dictate policies or laws, but we can make it easier for people to get in contact with people they need to be in touch with. I think that's key to fostering economic development."

What do you see as some of the biggest challenges in the Greencastle-Antrim community?

"I think first of all, we have our economic challenges, just in the state of the economy. Everybody has that, but I think that's a particular challenge right now.

"A second challenge is an underlying concern about taxes. You've got the school renovations that will be brought before the board of directors in the next couple of months. So I think people are very community-minded and want to support the school, but there's an underlying concern about the economic state of all that.

"I think the third challenge is borough council put together a strategic five-year plan. It's kind of a positive challenge in that we have committees formed and we're working on things for the future to improve. I think that's exciting.

"Within the economy, I don't really see the downsides. It will be really interesting to see how all of this comes together over the next few years with Norfolk Southern and the ATAPCO development. By working together, we can really do some special things."

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The Joel Fridgen File

Age: 54

Family: Wife, Patricia, and five children

Education: Graduated in 1977 from Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., major: history and social science

Job experience: Twenty-seven years in the printing industry, including various management and executive positions within Taylor Corp.

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