



# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 3 | SPRING 2022



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# STENZON



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## CELEBRATING CHEESE CURDS

Water's Edge Cheese Curds made their official debut in the city of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin by hosting the Chippewa Economic Development Corporation's (CEDC's) Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) Visit and a tour of their production facility. CEDC's BEAR Visit program is aimed at recognizing and supporting the accomplishments of our local businesses. The BEAR Visits open up a dialogue for everyone present to engage in a conversation about the supply chain, workforce, the business climate, and other economic issues.

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## BOARD BOASTS

Any organization wouldn't be what they are without their Board of Directors. CEDC appreciates our board members for all of the superb work they do and for being fantastic business leaders! These leaders continuously volunteer their Time, Talent, and Treasure for the CEDC. Doing this, they ensure that the mission of the organization is carried out by formulating economic development policies and programs that are unique, engaging, and effective.

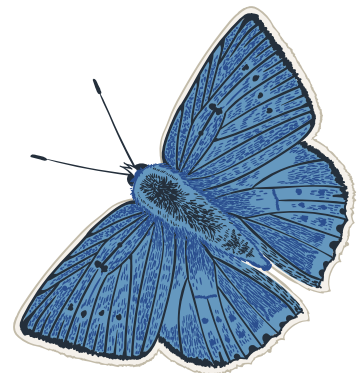
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# ADVOCATING FOR SOLUTIONS

The CEDC continuously works with our elected officials to ensure that the Chippewa Valley has a positive, pro-business climate.

Through CEDC's Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) Visits, the organization gains a better understanding of the legislative issues that concern our local companies. These visits help CEDC identify what policies to support and work to prohibit. In this past legislative session, CEDC advocated for the following:

- support for the use of Environmental Remediation Tax Increment Districts (ERTIDs)
- increased broadband funding
- reduction of healthcare costs
- continuation of funding for workforce apprenticeship and customized training grants
- taking steps to solve the Chippewa Valley's workforce housing crisis

In addition, the Advocacy Committee testified in support of legislation, provided recommendations and input into ARPA funding projects, and hosted a variety of listening sessions with political candidates and elected officials.





# CELEBRATING CHEESE CURDS



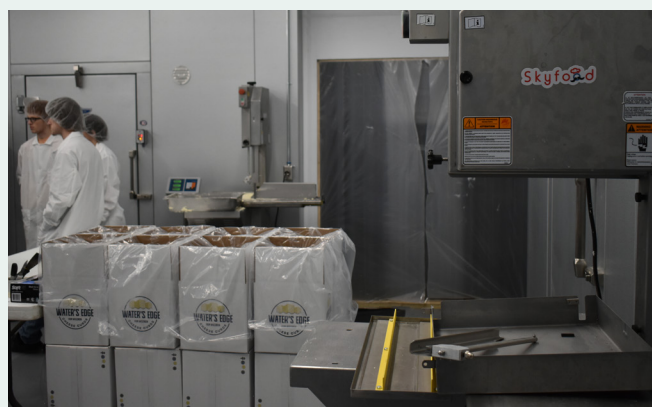
Over 12 years ago, Water's Edge Cheese Curds started in a small building in Jim Falls, Wisconsin. Beginning as a secret recipe in the kitchen of a Northwoods Wisconsin supper club, it has grown into one of the nation's best-selling cheese curd products. Today, the company produces frozen, ready-to-fry beer battered cheese curds – but not just any cheese curd – they make the unique “square ones,” utilizing a cube of fresh Wisconsin cheddar and covering it with a secret beer batter crust, made with neighbor Leinenkugel's beer.



Light, crispy, and fresh, Water's Edge Cheese Curds are rapidly becoming a national sensation in bars, pubs, and restaurants. In 2018, Water's Edge was named the Best Cheese Curd in Wisconsin, and in 2019, Minnesota named it their Best Cheese Curd product. As the fried treat continues to increase in popularity, the product has been introduced in other states throughout the country as a “mini grilled cheese.” This growth has positioned the company for expansion in Chippewa County, Wisconsin.

In 2020, the factory was forced to shut down for four months due to the pandemic. Water's Edge Cheese Curds scrambled, pivoted, and adjusted their business operations to survive and continued their plans to expand into a new facility that would be capable of positioning them for

growth after the pandemic. With the additional help of the CEDC and the Main Street BounceBack program, Water's Edge identified a 5000 square foot building that was vacant and ready for remodeling. “Being able to expand to Chippewa County, especially downtown Chippewa Falls, has increased our visibility to the community. We have people coming in four or five times a week asking when we will sell them a bag of cheese curds – time will tell.” noted Luke Grube, General Manager of the Chippewa Falls location and son of Al Grube.



“Economic development plays a huge role in getting businesses in the Chippewa Valley the resources and education they need to be successful,” stated Rebecca Reinhardt, Vice Chair of the CEDC Board of Directors. “The CEDC continues to support our businesses by advising with business plans, writing support letters for funding, and assisting with grant applications, among many others.”

What is next for Water's Edge? Currently, the company is partnering with local food distributors and are wholesale only, but Luke says that the incorporation of retail is “inevitable.” If the company continues to produce at their current rate, they estimate that they will need more production space in two to five years.

# ...S.T.E.A.M. CAREERS

The CEDC was asked to assist and be a stagehand, lending its networking and marketing expertise for two productions. These events highlighted the opportunities for our future workforce through local company job opportunities and higher education pursuits.

Chippewa Falls Senior High School (“Chi Hi”) opened their STEAM production for all to see in mid-March. The event was alive with activity as hundreds of “Cardinals” circled the campus. So, what is STEAM, you ask? STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics. Its aim is to round out the US educational curriculum to help our young future workers develop skills that are needed in a rapidly changing economy.

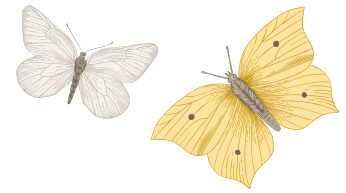


Cadott High School (CHS) jumped into action in early April with their Career Expo. This educational experience also focused on career opportunities in the Chippewa Valley. “Hornets” buzzed throughout the campus, learning from over 60 companies about career fields and their advantages. In total, over 100 CEDC supporters and stakeholders participated in these educational school career events held at Chi Hi and Cadott High School.

As the curtain closes on STEAM Night and Career Expo, we would like to thank all the volunteers, businesses, and parents for their participation. A standing ovation goes out to the Chi Hi and CHS teachers for organizing these great events and teaching the future workforce about careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math, and everything in-between!



# ...COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP



There are some who believe that within the next 15 years, about half of all United States Manufacturing firms will close their doors! Currently, worker shortages are empowering existing workers to do some rethinking. They now have the opportunity to reconsider what jobs they want to do, where they want to live, and what industries they want to work in. Manufacturing appears to be at a disadvantage because many potential workers do not view manufacturing jobs as secure and stable compared to those in other industries. Finally, there is an acceleration to all things digital-Industry 4.0, which has the potential to leave many manufacturers behind because they are slow to invest in technology.

To survive, manufacturing companies need to move away from being consumers of talented workers and become better manufacturers talent. More small manufacturing firms need to follow Process Metal Innovator's (PMI's) lead. A Bloomer Wisconsin Company, PMI, reached out to their local economic development corporation (CEDC), their local school district (Bloomer, Wisconsin School District), their local community colleges (Chippewa Valley Technical

College & Northwood Technical College), and their local workforce agency (Workforce Resource) to develop a partnership that they would submit for a \$10 million State of Wisconsin Workforce Innovation Grant — which they won — for a training classroom, lab space, and equipment on site. This facility was designed to improve the manufacturing industry's perception among the workforce and the value proposition of manufacturing among youth!

Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin toured PMI in Bloomer. The company fabricates many parts for customers, like Generac Power Systems and Menard's, and the tour highlighted how the company is embracing technology and Industry 4.0 and are hiring people with the right attitude and ability to learn. PMI continues to take the proactive steps of adopting digital transformation (DT) technologies, working with the local school district to enhance critical skills in students, and collaborating with local technical colleges to help financially aid students who choose to work in tomorrow's manufacturing companies. We look forward to seeing what they have in store for the manufacturing industry to come.



# BOARD BOASTS



Over the last quarter, there have been numerous times where the CEDC Board of Directors went above and beyond their obligations. They continue to set the standard as best in practice for a corporations' Board of Directors, as well as work to better both the business climate and economic development in our area.

BEAR Listening Sessions would not be as successful as they are without members of our Board helping organize and run them. Board member Rob Mooney, Production Manager at Alliance Plastics, was instrumental in getting a recent Senator Ron Johnson BEAR Listening Session set up and executed to perfection. Mooney, along with Cathy Leibke (Larson Management), Rebecca Reinhardt (CCF Bank), and Melissa Peterson (Frandsen Bank), serve on the 2024 Farm Technology Days Executive Committee.

In further promoting CEDC's business climate action(s) to future leaders, CEDC Board Member Ron Haas (Martino's Pizza, Owner) collaborated with Lona Cook, CEDC's Advocacy Chair, and facilitated other BEAR events in Stanley and Lafayette while Board member Melissa Peterson (Frandsen Bank) helped organize and provide feedback to Congressional Candidate Rebecca Cooke on CEDC's important economic development objectives and programs.



Board Chair Tom Waldusky (Benedict Refrigeration), Vice Chair Rebecca Reinhardt, and Board Member Karen Smith (Security Bank) gave an update presentation about economic development and the CEDC to the members of the Chippewa Valley Bankers Association.

Shirley Gutsch (PMI), CEDC Board Member, was instrumental in organizing and getting the RESTORE grant program started and off on the right foot. She spent countless hours forging partnerships on behalf of CEDC and PMI while working with Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) on the \$10 million Workforce Innovation Grant (RESTORE Program) from Governor Tony Evers.

CEDC Board Members, for years, have been working diligently to improve broadband services throughout Chippewa County. These efforts are led by Ryan Hartzell (Ntera), who helps organize many regional telecom broadband meetings and coordinates community broadband education events. From serving on various committees [Fundraising, Revolving Loan Fund, Annual Meeting, Advocacy, BEAR, and Honeycomb HATCH] to recruiting additional investors for the organization, the CEDC Board of Directors is actively involved in everything we do!





# ...LUNCHEES AND LEARNING

Cory White, owner of Small Business Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S), presented at a CEDC BEAR Lunch & Learn. He updated the group on what it takes for a small business to get off the ground while avoiding the fines and other financial pitfalls that are associated with ignoring or violating government safety and environmental regulations.



Typically, large businesses have the resources necessary to hire an Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) employee who works to keep the company in compliance. Businesses with 250+ employees hire over 75% of EHS professionals in the United States – putting added pressure on smaller firms looking for the right EH&S employee. White pointed out that one way a small business can protect themselves and be more competitive is to utilize consultants and outsource EH&S functions.

As a part of CEDC's Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) program, these lunches are designed to aid



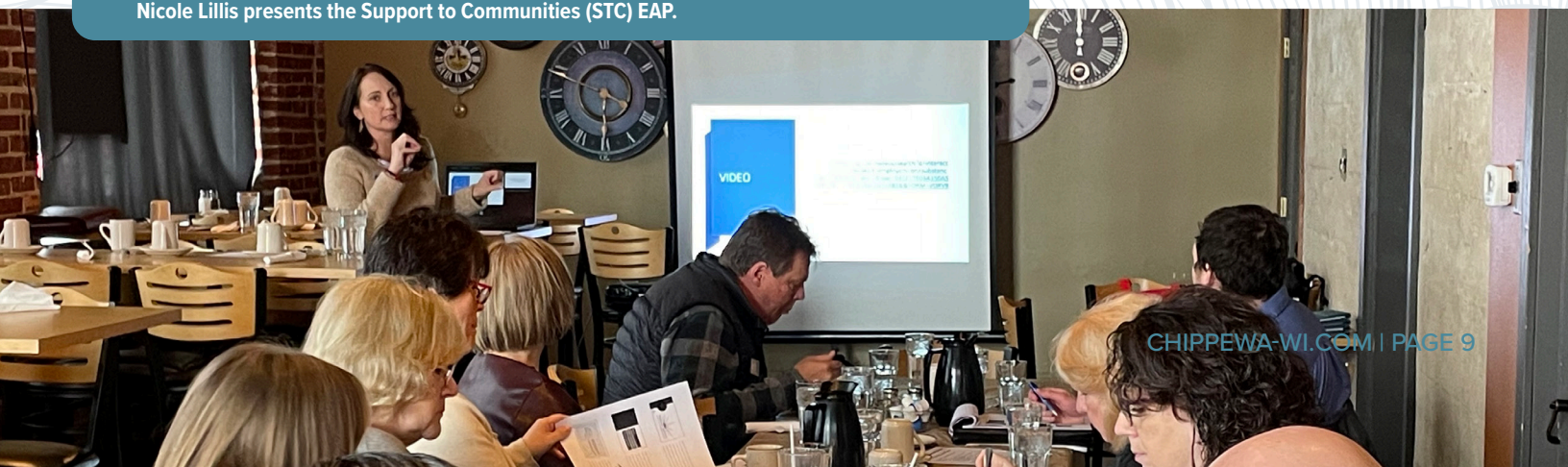
the entrepreneur in staying abreast of topics that could impact their businesses. Besides OSHA issues, another BEAR Lunch & Learn was held to discuss the importance of utilizing Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

Nicole Lillis, a representative of Workforce Resource, presented to CEDC Investors in Bloomer about the importance of tackling mental health issues in the workplace. Discussion at the lunch centered around how to know when your customers or employees might be dealing with too much stress.

"Many small entrepreneurs that do not have health insurance or benefit programs are not aware of some of the assistance like the Support to Communities (STC) Program," noted Lillis. "It is one program that can really help in talent retention and reentering the workforce."

Contact the CEDC if you would like to learn more about the STC Program and how it might be able to help you retain your employees.

Nicole Lillis presents the Support to Communities (STC) EAP.



# MARK YOUR CALENDARS



## APRIL 20, 2022

### BEAR DISCUSSIONS PODCAST

Download CEDC's BEAR Discussions Podcast or join live on Zoom to explore unique entrepreneurial interviews, discussions on business solutions, and issues from a variety of co-hosts. Business Expansion AND Retention (BEAR) is an economic development strategy that proactively connects existing businesses with each other to discuss, share ideas, and improve community collaboration.



### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

What gets students interested in manufacturing?  
How can our community optimize its manufacturing pipeline?

Find out about a program founded by a CVTC Instructor that does just that at this **Business Expansion And Retention Discussion**  
+ St. Joseph's Hospital Education Session!

**April 20, 2022**  
**12-1 pm**  
Via ZOOM

Email [danielle@chippewa-wi.com](mailto:danielle@chippewa-wi.com) for link



## APRIL 26, 2022

### CEDC'S DEVELOPERS UPDATE

Join us for lunch and an update from site developers, city personnel, housing authorities, and telecom companies.

### LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

What projects are being developed in Chippewa County?  
How does the area look through the eyes of a developer?

Sign up and find out at the  
**CEDC's Developers Update!**

Sponsored by:  
  


**April 26, 2022**  
**11:30 am - 2:30 pm**  
Chippewa Valley Technical College  
770 Scheidler Rd, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729  
Space is limited. Register at  
**[chippewa-wi.com](http://chippewa-wi.com)**

