

Embracing immigration part of Zimmer plan: Riggins presents plan to MMU board

By Kelsey Alumbaugh. The Marshall Democrat-News: January 29, 2013.

"(Immigration has) been a very important part of being able to compete and the local economy," Marshall-Saline Development Corporation Director Bill Riggins said at the Marshall Municipal Utilities Board of Public Works meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 29.

Riggins commented on the influx of immigration in Saline County.

"We need to embrace that, work with it, because at one point in time we were all immigrants," he continued. "If you look at our economic base, two of our largest employers, ConAgra and Cargill, basically almost 50 percent of their work force is immigrants now. So without them, we would probably not have those two industries left here in town or in the county."

Riggins noted embracing immigration is the best way for the county to move forward.

"It's something that you can either embrace immigration and keep on growing and expanding or you can push against it and most of those people are going down," he said. "That is a very important part of our economy and moving forward."

Riggins told the board MSDC had worked with Zimmer on approximately 50 projects over the last year to bring in 169 new jobs that lead to \$46.5 million of tax credits through the state.

"We also had another \$11 million in expansions that we were working on that we didn't get tax credits for," Riggins said. "We can account for at least 235 new jobs in the county last year that we worked directly with."

On March 1, a new company from out of the area will be coming to Marshall with an average payroll of \$50,000 annually, according to Riggins.

"We need to promote entrepreneurship," he said. "If we want to keep people here that's one thing we need to push and support."

Providing a place for entrepreneurship to grow is another part of the plan.

"One of the things we're working on is we want to have an incubator of some kind for people who have an idea, a good business plan, but maybe don't have the funding at all to have a place to work out of or start, we can give them some place they can start," Riggins said. "Most of them I've looked into goes about a year and gives them some office space and gives them a chance to get started."

A loan fund is another prospect Riggins is looking into as a way to promote the growth of new businesses.

"Through some of the government programs there is money available that you can set up a revolving loan program," he elaborated. "If somebody has a good business plan, a good idea, you can help them with the capital to get started. As they grow they can pay it back so you can revolve it and put it into someone else to help move forward and keep it going."

Globalization, education and urban/rural positioning are other parts of the Zimmer plan. Riggins noted, in regards to globalization, manufacturing jobs are starting to come back to Saline County. The county is one of the first 13 counties in Missouri to sign up for the work readiness certification as part of the plan to develop education.

Urban/rural positioning involves working with other counties to make Saline County a more appealing place to be considered for jobs and economic development opportunities.

"A lot of them require a population of at least 40,000 or more and we only have 23,000 in the whole county," Riggins explained. "So we have to regionalize with other counties to get them to look at us."

There were no action items discussed at the meeting.

Jeff Bergstrom, electric distribution director, updated the board on the bucket truck MMU traded in. The truck broke down during Altec's drive-away service pick-up and Bergstrom is waiting to hear if MMU will be asked to help pay for part of the repairs.

The minutes of the last meeting were approved and bills were paid. The next regular meeting of the MMU Board of Public Works will be Thursday, Feb. 14, at 8:30 a.m