

Slater hosts second Zimmer econ development meeting

By Maggie Menderski. The Marshall Democrat-News: March 12, 2012.

Troy Nash of Zimmer Real Estate called out the seemingly youngest person in the crowd at the economic development meeting Monday, March 12, and asked him why he stayed in Slater.

Tedd Wiseman pointed to his boss and said "this guy."

When Wiseman found a comfortable job as the location manager for Central Missouri Agri-Service, he stayed in Slater. Furthermore, he never intends to leave.

"I grew up about five houses down the road," Wiseman said.

Northern District Commissioner Norvelle Brown's children took a different approach.

"I have three children, and all three of them moved out of town so that they can make a decent living," Brown said.

Roughly 25 people gathered on Monday after the Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Grapevine Restaurant to discuss ways to stimulate economic growth and create jobs attractive enough to lure the next generation to Saline County.

This second collaborative meeting between residents, MSDC and Zimmer Real Estate will contribute to a comprehensive plan for the county.

This past week, Nash conducted a meeting in Sweet Springs, and he will facilitate a third meeting at the Martin Community Center on Tuesday, March 13, at 5:30 p.m. at the Martin Community Center in Marshall.

"We need Slater, Sweet Springs and Marshall working together because anything that comes to the county is good for the whole county," said Executive Director of Marshall-Saline Development Corporation Bill Riggins.

Nash cited Richard C. Longworth's book, "Caught in the Middle," as he explained the effects of globalization on both Missouri and the Midwest as a whole.

The shift in the economic times has caused many of the Midwest's rural communities to struggle.

"Heavy manufacturing is not coming back, and the farm industry has changed dramatically," he said.

Nash explained Slater alone cannot compete against places such as India and China for business; however, Saline County could recognize its weaknesses, play on its strengths and perhaps generate economic growth throughout the community.

"Slater is a very different community, and I mean that very complimentary," Nash said.

Nash commended the town for its cleanliness, progressive nature and aggressive city government. He asked the group to consider what kind of improvements it wanted to see.

Riggins noted Saline County had lost at least 1,500 residents in the past 40 years. Young families keep communities growing, and Saline County has struggled to hold onto its youth.

Several crowd members cited health care, poor technology, education and a lack of educated jobs in the community as reason for the population decline.

Slater councilwoman Cathie Jefferies suggested the town could use it's aging population to create jobs.

"There's going to be more people aging, so we have to take care of them," Jefferies said. "Bring our hospital up to a different level, then we can take care of them here instead of having them go out."

Nash expressed a need to educate the outside community about the strengths of rural living.

Having come from the Kansas City area, he readily admitted both agriculture technology and lifestyle baffled him.

Riggins had arranged for Nash and his family to spend time in the rural setting, and now Nash said he hoped to incorporate agri-tourism into the plan.

"How do you generate that enlightenment," Nash asked. "How do you market that?"

Likewise, Riggins mentioned the possibility of bringing outside money into the county without necessarily generating more residents. Nash and Riggins have extensively discussed the possibilities for development at the Marshall Junction.