



Corridor

MAY 2021



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NORTH IOWA'S CORE STRENGTH: COMMUNITY

SPRING 2021 BRINGS WITH IT A SENSE OF OPTIMISM that really wasn't available to us last spring, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. And if we can't say we're out of the woods yet, it's clear that one thing carrying North Iowa through the troubles is community perseverance.

"We've all worked hard together so we don't have quite the economic impact seen in other places," says Chad Schreck, CEO and President of the North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corp. "Our communities, counties, cities, organizations, and businesses all came together to lessen the impact of the pandemic."

Vision North Iowa, a partnership of organizations with a mission to improve the lives of North Iowans, provided an existing framework to share resources and strategies to lessen the pandemic's economic impact. One hundred and twenty four local businesses received North Iowa Small Business Recovery Fund grants totalling \$435,995. The Iowa Economic Development Authority distributed an additional \$1.1 million to 56 local businesses. The NIACC John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center set up a small business emergency hotline, helping small businesses find funds, like the Paycheck Protection Program.

Beyond the grant programs designed to lessen the strain on area businesses, there's also the determination of North Iowans to personally help other individuals this past year.

"Businesses waved their hands if they were struggling, and the community came to help them," Schreck said. "For example, when Awe'z Sandwich Shop in Mason City put out the call that they were in desperate times, people responded by shopping local and ordering carry-out."

Grassroots campaigns came to the aid of businesses shuttered or diminished by pandemic isolation. The Clear Lake Chamber of Commerce came up with the "Buy in Clear Lake" gift card campaign and raised a "staggering" amount of money, according to Schreck: \$67,170 that directly benefited local business owners. Mason City Chamber also sold \$35,200 in Chamber Bucks benefiting businesses in Mason City and Clear Lake. Residents bought 2,200 "North Iowa Strong" shirts to raise \$22,100 for local business.

"The community as a whole came together and lifted up people who needed it, at the time they needed it," Schreck says. "And not just businesses - people helped their neighbors who couldn't get groceries or who lost daycare because of closures. That's why we live in North Iowa. In the face of adversity, we really come together."

He notes that it helped that North Iowa went into the pandemic at a really good economic spot, with a lot of positive projects underway: completion of The River Apartments in Mason City; construction start-up for the Mason City Natatorium/Gym, Clear Lake School Wellness Center, Fairfield by Marriott hotel in Clear Lake, and NIACC solar array project; and expansions at Kraft Heinz, Bushel Boy Farms, and Golden Grain Energy, among others.

"I'm proud of all the things we've done, compared to the situation in some big cities," Schreck says. "It's making the area more attractive, and the increase in working from home makes it more feasible for many families to consider a move. We have the opportunity to attract remote workers from anywhere in the country, because they no longer have to work at the office. And one of the best things about living in North Iowa is the community that comes with it."

CHAD SCHRECK

PRESIDENT & CEO

cschreck@northiowacorridor.com

SHAUN ARNESON

VP, EXISTING BUSINESS & PROJECT
MANAGEMENT

sarneson@northiowacorridor.com

HUNTER CALLANAN

WORKFORCE SPECIALIST

hcallanan@northiowacorridor.com

JOYCE MARTIN

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
COORDINATOR

jmartin@northiowacorridor.com