Volunteers Begin Business Retention/Expansion Visits

As a part of the Barnesville Economic Development Authority and Barnesville Main Street sponsored Business Retention and Expansion program, volunteers will be visiting Barnesville businesses in the next couple of months to gather confidential information in an effort to gain a better understanding of local business needs. The collective responses will be analyzed, providing valuable information and ideas to invigorate the local economy through targeted action.

Over 40 community leaders met in the Wells Fargo meeting room on Monday, September 30 to prepare for the community’s economic future. The 90 minute meeting was the formal kick-off of a local Business Retention and Expansion Program (BR&E) sponsored by the Barnesville Economic Development Authority (EDA) and the Barnesville Main Street program.

While local volunteers will be assisting with gathering data, technical and research support is being provided by the University of Minnesota Extension office.

“Existing firms are the best sources of growth. We want to find out how we can help them to grow in our community. We have an excellent team in place to work on this project and expect excellent results,” said Karen Lauer, EDA executive director and coordinator of the local BR&E Program.

The program, which has been successfully implemented in communities large and small across the United States, is focused on stimulating economic development by assisting local businesses.

Karen Hagen, Main Street Program director and a member of the BR&E Task Force, pointed out that to assist our businesses, we must first identify the needs and concerns of the businesses and then address those concerns to improve the local business climate.

The volunteer visitors hope to visit 80-90 Barnesville area businesses between now and November 29. During each visit, each team of two volunteers will be using a 14-page questionnaire to gather information about each business. The training session held last week was to help prepare the volunteers for the interviews.

Shelly Dunham, one of the volunteers helping with the interviews is very excited to be part of the BR&E project. “This is a great opportunity to reach out to our businesses telling them their business is important to Barnesville, we are care about them and find out what we can do to help them grow and expand!”

During the training, volunteers viewed a video prepared by the University of Minnesota which gave more information about the program and how it has been effectively used in other communities across the state, and well as reviewed the questionnaire in detail.
Lauer emphasized that the information gathered through the surveys will be strictly confidential. If a business asks that we follow-up directly with them about a specific question or concern, they will be asked permission to provide their name to individuals who will be able to answer their questions.

After the interviews are completed, the U of MN Extension office will tabulate the data and provide a report summarizing the results and recommending possible action steps to address any comments or concerns that were raised.

For more information about the Barnesville Business Retention & Expansion program, contact Coordinator Karen Lauer at 354-2145.