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Fayetteville-Cumberland Chamber selects president

By Don Worthington
Business editor

Douglas Peters will become the new president and CEO of the Fayetteville-Cumberland County Chamber of Commerce.

Peters is the chief executive officer and president of Greater Findlay (Ohio) Inc., a public-private partnership similar to the chamber of commerce.

Fayetteville chamber officials were set to make the announcement today after Peters told his board. Peters confirmed his hiring during a telephone interview Thursday.

“Fayetteville is an absolutely beautiful area and a wonderful opportunity for the right person,” Peters said.

The chamber plans to make a formal announcement this morning.

Peters replaces Bill Martin, who resigned from the Cumberland County Business Council — the previous name of the chamber — in June. Martin, the first president of the council, served four years.

This is the third time the chamber has been poised to announce Martin’s successor. Two finalists backed away from the job.

“I hope the community sees we took our time and did it right,” said Gordon Rose, chairman of the chamber’s board of directors.

“We didn’t settle for second best. Doug Peters will take us from good to great and he is excited about coming here.”

Peters, who is 44, is a native of Virginia. He has a degree from Anderson College and certifications in economic development from the Indiana Economic Development Academy at Ball State and the Institutes of Organizational Management at the University of Notre Dame.

He has 23 years of experience in chamber of commerce and economic development activities, most of it in Indiana and Ohio.

He was recently named the 2007-08 Professional of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce Executives of Ohio.

In 2007, Greater Findlay Inc. economic development deals added 725,000 square feet of construction, retained more than 3,200 jobs and added 800 jobs, creating a total investment of \$214 million.

In some respects, Findlay is similar to Fayetteville. Its largest employer is Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. with about 2,000 workers. Blanchard Valley Health System employs about 1,560 people.

The median household income is \$43,856.

Peters was contacted by a headhunter about the job. He initially was not interested, but took the time to investigate. He said the more he learned, the more interested he became.

Peters said Fayetteville and Cumberland County's unified approach to economic development appeals to him. He said he also was impressed by the business community and the challenges presented by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission's decisions.

"Small businesses are the backbone of my responsibility," he said. "Every stakeholder of the chamber should get a return on its investment."

Finding someone to balance economic development and traditional chamber of commerce duties was a priority for the Fayetteville search committee.

"Everyone knows me as the chamber guy," Peters said. "My e-mail address is chamberguy@aol.com."

Peters is under contract to Greater Findlay until June 12. He said he intends to honor that contract.

At the same time, he hopes to begin work on a 100-day plan to guide the Fayetteville chamber when he takes over.

Period of turbulence

He inherits a chamber that has been through tumultuous times.

The recruitment of an ethanol manufacturing plant created a firestorm of concerns from residents. The chamber and the county Board of Commissioners retreated from the recruitment of a firm called E85.

Martin resigned shortly thereafter. Business Council officials say his resignation and the E85 decision are unrelated.

Then came the recruitment process to find Martin's successor. The same search firm that found Martin recommended his replacement, Rose said.

"There haven't been a lot of positive headlines," Rose acknowledged.

While the E85 recruitment has been largely cast as a negative for the chamber, Rose said it ultimately is a win. The process showed the chamber a number of deficiencies, especially in its relationship with residents and elected leaders.

At a strategic planning session in the fall, chamber officials refined four goals, centering their efforts on economic development, military affairs, downtown and local business development.

Chamber officials also have been busy crafting a plan to get community opinions on what industries the chamber should recruit.

The chamber plans to use a process similar to the Greater Fayetteville Futures initiative of several years ago. Greater Fayetteville Futures was a grass-roots effort that garnered several hundred volunteers.

The effort identified three areas of emphasis: unifying economic development efforts, leveraging the military's presence economically and improving the city's image.

The business council was created as a result of Greater Fayetteville Futures' efforts.

The council then helped lead efforts to use local military ties, such as the creation of the Military Business Center and the Defense Security and Technology Accelerator, a small-business incubator.

"We haven't been an organization that has been sitting still," Rose said. "We are not broken or stranded."