



# PROGRESS: Area mayors join together at Economic Issues Luncheon

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - Three River Bend area mayors addressed a room full of business owners and representatives from local businesses Thursday afternoon during the Dec. 15 **Riverbend Growth Association (RBGA) Economic Issues** luncheon at **Bluff City Grill**.

**Bethalto Mayor Alan Winslow, Godfrey Mayor Mike McCormick and Grafton Mayor Tom Thompson** were each invited to speak about the news and progress of each of their towns in 2016. Each spoke positively about the current economic progress of their respective towns and discussed some of the possible future initiatives being proposed to improve further. These improvements involve finances, infrastructure and, in the case of **Bethalto**, utilizing the environment.

To address the catastrophic damage caused to many Bethalto residences following two major flooding situations in 2016, Winslow said the village is working with representatives of **Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC)** to create a proposal to utilize native plants and grasses to help curb the sudden influx of storm water increasingly severe storms have created recently. Winslow said the village will compare the cost of the natural system with a second option of digging ditches and lining them with rock. He said ultimately the choice of which project will be chosen will be decided by their costs. Winslow, however, said he was entirely behind the natural option currently being championed by LCCC

"Several of our team members read an article about LCCC winning a sustainability award for helping storm water off campus," he said. "We toured the campus and had a meeting with community stakeholders, including someone from Madison County Soil and Water. We called **Dr. Chapman** from the college asking if he could send someone from the college. He sent eight people, each one had something to do with a part of the project at the college."

Winslow was impressed by the college's ability to make the areas used to catch and contain water into park-like settings. He said the same could be done in Bethalto to make necessary improvements in infrastructure into assets for the community. The basins, bioswales and radial riffle dams would utilize nature and native plants to hold storm water for longer periods of time, preventing it from turning into a property-damaging deluge.

Currently, the water drains through the middle of the village and eventually into the river. Winslow said that current channel would work if the pathways were not obstructed. Unfortunately, hazards such as a fallen tree or a blocked culvert, which can be common during severe weather situations, cause the system to fail. Native grasses planted at bioswales have very deep roots and could act as straws, drawing the water from the surface down to underground aquifers.

Storm waters would run from these bioswale basin through the radial riffles, which would be composed of small dams and channels. Water rushing toward these would be slowed as well. Those riffles would result in another bioswale basin, Winslow said. The current proposal would fix as much as a mile and a half of the three to three and a half mile current storm water pathway.

"Money is the number one with this one," Winslow said. "The overall effect is number two. Whether we do this or we dig ditches for the runoff, inaction is not an option."

Winslow said the final cost of the natural method is being calculated currently. He said it would require less construction than the traditional rocky ditch approach, but the design costs would be higher. He said grants may allow for as many as four acres worth of free native grasses and could possibly cover other future costs as well.

Mayor McCormick spoke highly of Godfrey's 25th year of existence, following Winslow's presentation. He was most proud of initiatives taken by the **Godfrey Parks and Rec Department** and the **Godfrey Public Works Department**. The latter has utilized 2,000 tons of asphalt for paving as many as a dozen streets in the village and several subdivisions, including River-Aire and Riverwood. Because of its ability to do much of its work in-house, the public works department has been able to pave more areas of Godfrey than any previous year of the village at a savings of nearly \$300,000 to taxpayers, McCormick said.

He also commended the parks and rec department for new playground equipment at the **Homer Adams Park** located behind the village hall, including an "expressions" swing, which can seat both parent and child. Another of those swings was donated to

**Glazebrook Park** from the Godfrey Women's Club as well. He was also pleased with the addition of a large jumping pillow at Glazebrook Park, which he assured could be utilized by both children and adults.

Besides the improvements, McCormick also lauded several events, which occurred in the village throughout the year, including its second annual triathlon and the MS Bike Ride. He said \$1.8 million in business improvements were also done in the village especially through the **Trail Blazers Commons** apartments at the LCCC campus.

McCormick also unveiled an in-progress app the village is developing, which will allow residents to send pictures of potholes directly to the village for repairs.

He ended his address lamenting the untimely death of **St. Louis County Police Officer Blake Snyder**. Snyder was active with the Godfrey Parks and Rec Department before being murdered in the line of duty in Oct. 2016.

Mayor Thompson of Grafton said his village was pleased to announce as much as \$1.4 million in improvements, a high number considering the village's less-than-1,000 population. He said three new houses were being built and a six bedroom bed and breakfast was currently in development. He also announced the village would continue to dredge the river for the continuance of operations of the Grafton Ferry. That ferry brought as many people as 15,200 to Grafton. That number may equate to as an estimated \$900,000 being spent within the village, Thompson said.

"Not all of them are spending their money in Grafton," Thompson acknowledged. "Some of them are turning right to go to Alton, and some of them are turning left to go to **Pere Marquette** or drive around **Calhoun County**."

Overall, he said, his eight years being mayor of Grafton have seen the village become better than it was when he was first elected. Thompson said bettering Grafton was his main goal of being mayor of the village.

"If you were there before the flood or just after and see what it was then compared to what it is now, there has been some radical changes there," he said.

The event is held twice a year by the RBGA. **RBGA President Monica Bristow** said half of the River Bend's 10 mayors are invited to speak at each event, with one in July and the other in December. She said it was a good way for community stakeholders to know the goings-on of the area. She chose to host it at Bluff City Grill to showcase the continuing improvements the business has undergone since owner **Cathy Gross** moved the location to the former Eagle's Club on East Broadway.