

Citizens of Newton are rolling up their sleeves and getting down to work with entrepreneurial zeal. They've got a lot of pride in the town they call home, and they're willing to put their passion and time into it. The fruits of their efforts are visible: a stronger, more vibrant Newton.

When world-renowned expert on rural leadership and economic development David Beurle came to Newton, recalls Kim Didier, executive director of the Newton Development Corporation, he told the town that no one else would lose sleep over Maytag's departure. "Beurle put forth the challenge that we needed to choose how we responded to Maytag leaving the community because if we didn't care enough to respond, no else would do it," she says.

The community did choose to respond with a collaborative effort to create a community vision and turn it into a reality—one step at a time. For over 100

# NEWTON RISING

The hubbub in this central Iowa community isn't just about the new, state-of-the-art speedway or even Maytag's sad departure. **BY ELIZABETH SAUNDERS** No, today's buzz has more to do with the town's residents, and how they're banded together in innovative ways to turn uncertainty into boundless opportunity.

years, Maytag Corporation has played a central role in Newton. As the largest employer in a town of 15,000 and a generous benefactor to the community, Maytag has a far-reaching legacy that endowed the city with a strong educational system, recreational and cultural facilities, corporate facilities, and a highly trained workforce. In the last decade, however, the company hit enormous financial difficulties, which led to its buyout by Whirlpool in 2006 and the subsequent announcement of the closure of Newton operations.

“The momentum we’ve been able to build is incredible,” Didier says. “Less than a year ago, we were still in the retention mode, trying to convince Whirlpool to stay. We’re tenacious optimists who look for how to make a ‘no’ into a ‘yes.’”

Some former Maytag employees transferred to the Whirlpool offices and others found new jobs throughout the country, but most stayed in Newton and are committed to preserving and enhancing the town they call home. “Where else can you live where you’re five minutes from [work], you get thank you notes for shopping at a store, and your mayor drops in and calls you by name?” says Lin Chape, director of project management with the Newton Transformation Council, a California native who has chosen to call Newton home.

Countless local leaders, organizations, and citizens have played a role in the town’s transition from corporate town to entrepreneurial incubator. Two overarching organizations have collaborated to provide cohesive leadership and organization for these efforts: the Newton Development Corporation and the Newton Transformation Council. “These committees of volunteers are working to move Newton from being dependent on Maytag and its strong corporate citizenship to being a self-reliant, financially stable community,” says Walt Smith, Chairman and CEO of Thombert, Inc., founder and chairman of ITWC, Inc., and long-time resident and involved citizen of Newton.

For over 40 years, the Newton Development Corporation (NDC) has brought together local, state, and federal resources to support the economy through industrial and business projects. The Newton Transformation Council (NTC) was formed in response to the Whirlpool acquisition; founding partners include Chape, the City of Newton, the Jasper Community Foundation, the United Way of Jasper County, and Whirlpool.

## **MORE THAN MAYTAG**

Residents of Newton didn’t just decide there needed to be change; they decided they were committed to making it happen. “Maytag’s presence in Newton had an effect on the characteristics, structure, and culture of the community,” Didier says. “The community is learning to work with a different structure that’s organic, grass roots, and focused on smaller business diversification.”

Among Newton’s biggest assets, Didier adds, is a well-educated, skilled work force. “Coupled with a physical infrastructure from transportation to buildings, that presents a turnkey opportunity for existing and new business growth.”

In order to retain the old Maytag facility, as well as human assets, the town acted quickly to find a local buyer for the former corporate office headquarters. Community leaders called Alan L. Wells, chairman and CEO of Iowa Telecom, and proposed the idea of buying the building and consolidating his headquarters, split between Grinnell and Newton, into a single Newton location. After analyzing the numbers and considering the community impact of keeping the headquarters vibrant and occupied, Iowa Telecom joined forces with the community to purchase the building. “The communities we’re in are important to us,” Wells says. “We only grow when our communities grow. This transaction allows us the opportunity to bring our corporate operations together in one location. Not only will we create 40 new jobs, but we also intend to utilize the balance of the space that we do not need as a magnet to help other businesses expand in the area.”

“This community partnership builds momentum for sustainable growth and the realization of our vision, our future,” adds Didier. “The scope of the project, once completed — when combining the purchase of the property, donations by Whirlpool, and the pledge of State and Federal funding — will be more than \$10 million. [It will also] create new jobs, new educational opportunities for our youth, and an economic endowment for the community.”

Iowa Telecom didn’t have to wait long for the magnetic attraction of great facilities and people to woo its first leaser. Right after Iowa Telecom took ownership of the building, Caleris, an information technology company that specializes in corporate IT and product helpdesk services, decided to open a new call center in the complex. Caleris plans on adding 100 new jobs to the town within the first year of operations and up to 200 more by 2009.

“There was a very good space in the old Newton headquarters that fit our needs,” says Rick Grewell, president of Caleris. “And the main thing we needed was people. Newton had a large group of exactly the type of trained people we were looking for who were available on short notice.”

“We were also looking for local support,” Grewell adds. “It’s hard to go to a brand new community and start up a business. This wouldn’t have happened without the development group and Iowa Telecom.”

Says Charles “Chaz” Allen, Newton mayor, “We’ve had a lot more than Maytag for a long time. The focus has been on Maytag, but the reality is that other businesses have been here, and those people are stepping up.”

Additionally the Newton/Jasper County area was recently designated as a region for MyEntreNet, a community-based entrepreneurship development system designed to connect start-up and operating companies with technical assistance and training.

NDC is also launching a formal Existing Business Initiative later this quarter to work with the many existing businesses in the area poised for growth.

“We’re responding to queries to outside companies, but we want to grow our own,” says Didier. “These companies will continue to be loyal beyond belief and appreciate the value and quality of the community, not just the lowest cost.”

### TEAMING FOR TOURISM

Newton’s primary goal, says Mayor Allen, is diversity of operations. “We’re working to create a tourism triangle between Altoona, Pella, and Newton.” This tourism triangle seeks to capitalize on the regions existing attractions, like Pella’s heritage and Lake Red Rock, and

to develop new one’s, like the Iowa Speedway and Earthpark.

The region has enough variety to suit any tourist’s taste. For lovers of the great outdoors, there are natural parks, like Lake Red Rock and the Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge &

Prairie Learning Center. For those who like more typical tourist destinations, there’s the quaint town of Pella and the thrill of Adventureland. And for those who like the best in food and wine, there are a multitude of culinary delights. The Maytag Dairy Farms, world renowned for its tangy blue cheese, offers the perfect complement to local wines. The region boasts three local wineries, including Three Hills Winery, Sugar Grove Winery, and Jasper Winery; the latter vintner received accolades for its wines in The New York Times. Sugar Grove Winery features live jazz and dinner theater in a peaceful rural setting. For fine dining, Newton houses LaCorsette Maison Inn, which features multicourse feasts served on tables laden with crystal and silver. Another renowned chef, Julie Trusler, hosts dinners in her 18th century farmhouse; some patrons book a year in advance.

Exciting new tourism developments are also springing up throughout the region. “I-80 is America’s main street, but we have not capitalized on that,” says David Oman, executive director of the Earthpark indoor rainforest project which is planned for construction in Pella.

One of the biggest new ventures racing onto the tourism scene is the Iowa Speedway, which opened on September 15, 2006. Stan Clement, president of U.S. MotorSport Corporation, and his brothers led the effort, enabled by a significant commitment by Manatt’s, Inc. and \$12.5 million in state tax relief. Just 15 months after the ground breaking on the \$70 million project, the track had its inaugural race, the Soy Biodiesel 250.

Clement spearheaded this opportunity and convinced Rusty Wallace, a well-known and popular NASCAR driver, to design the track. The course is designed to be short, fast, and safe, and it is the first track to imbed video cameras into the surface of the asphalt so viewers can view the underside of the cars screaming over the track. The SPEED Channel, the station of choice for race fans, carried the 2006 races, and in 2007 ABC will also televise the Indy car race worldwide.

The track has 25,000 permanent seats and a current capacity of 40,000, and Wallace and Paxton Water Architecture designed the Speedway to expand dramatically.

### THE NEWTON PROMISE


The citizens of Newton are using the changes within their town to make their strong educational system even better. They continue to support local schools, and are starting an action committee based around education.

Also, Whirlpool transferred two of the downtown Maytag buildings to Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC). The 40,000-square-foot space will house technical and vocational training programs for area high school students and community members. “DMACC operations will serve as a feeder system in which area high school students and residents can be trained, and ultimately serve as an important attraction element for employers and businesses across the region,” says Rob Denson, DMACC President.

Newton wants to create a culture and sense of importance around education. As part of that goal, the NDC is working on the “Newton Promise,” an economic development initiative to provide area high school students with college scholarships. The goal is to promote short- and long-term economic development and to continue to attract a high-quality workforce by making a college education available to all children who want to pursue it. In collaboration with the Iowa Student Loan Corporation, the NDC is working on funding strategies to turn this idea into a reality.

Grassroots efforts are also making progress on enhancing the art and culture of Newton. Far from fading, Newton is vibrant and thriving with a big vision and the courage and enthusiasm to make it happen.

“People are learning how to get things done and stepping up and taking charge,” says Chape.



“WE ONLY GROW WHEN OUR COMMUNITIES GROW. THIS TRANSACTION ALLOWS US THE OPPORTUNITY TO BRING OUR CORPORATE OPERATIONS TOGETHER IN ONE LOCATION.”



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