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Iowa Business Council’s “Vision to Vitality” Forum Demonstrates Community Collaboration Spurs Growth

(MUSCATINE, Iowa) – The Iowa Business Council (IBC) held its second “Vision to Vitality” community forum in Muscatine yesterday at The Merrill Hotel and Conference Center. The free event gave attendees the opportunity to gain insight from local leaders, learn how the Greater Muscatine area has been working collaboratively to address its community’s challenges, discuss potential action items for the community moving forward, and see how Iowa stacks up compared to other states in the IBC’s signature research document, [Iowa’s Competitive Dashboard](#).

Along with IBC Executive Director Georgia Van Gundy, panel participants included:

- Rich Dwyer, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Enterprise Risk Management, Kent Corporation
- Greg Jenkins, President and CEO, Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Gary Carlson, Vice President of Member and Community Relations, HNI Corporation
- Dr. Jerry Riibe, Superintendent, Muscatine Community School District

Dwyer discussed how Align Impact Muscatine has led the charge for addressing the area’s workforce challenges, citing recent success with a work training program that helped to employ four previously homeless individuals in Muscatine.

“The Iowa Business Council member CEOs who were in attendance were incredibly impressed with the initiatives that Muscatine area leaders have implemented to continue to improve the quality of life in this region as a way to attract people to work, live and raise a family in the area,” said Van Gundy. “Align Impact Muscatine is leading this effort, and has already seen great results. AIM’s work proves that a collaborative approach to growth works and that when we come together, we win.”

Jenkins discussed the community’s efforts to address the challenge of workers commuting in and out of Muscatine, but not necessarily living in town. Carlson concurred, citing leaders’ work to address the community’s shortage of affordable housing and shared how surrounding larger population centers are benefiting from the strong economy and job offerings in Muscatine.

Carlson summarized it simply, while driving home the importance of addressing Iowa communities’ housing needs, “Housing is where jobs sleep at night.”

Dr. Riibe offered examples of how the Muscatine Community School District is tailoring its course offerings to make certain that students are prepared to enter the workforce or enroll in post-secondary education. This includes removing barriers – like offering free ACT testing for all high school juniors – and partnering with Muscatine Community College to give students a diverse set of skills and access to career training. Riibe suggested that the community could further help school districts like Muscatine by showing students and parents the quality careers – and more affordable pathways — available within the skilled trades.

During the open discussion period of the event, attendees were able to provide feedback to IBC members and the panel participants, sharing about their businesses’ barriers to growth and best practices. IBC members and leadership remarked how the comments from local business owners and community leaders regarding workforce concerns and population growth aligned with the data outlined in the Iowa’s Competitive Dashboard.

“The Iowa Business Council’s members come to the table with a commitment to a higher purpose – to serve as a catalyst for economic vitality in all corners of the state,” said Stan Askren, an IBC member and current Chairman of the Board for

HNI Corporation. “As a long time Muscatine and Iowa resident, I am proud to share our community’s story of collaborative growth with fellow Iowa Business Council members as we seek to replicate growth like we are experiencing in our city across Iowa. I also believe the challenges this community faces are not unique to our town. Iowa Business Council Members will continue advocating for policies that help break these barriers to future growth.”

The IBC will hold its final Vision to Vitality forum for 2018 in Le Mars. Details about the third event, which will be hosted by Wells Enterprises, Inc., will be released at a later date.

For more information on the IBC and to access its research and data, please visit www.IowaBusinessCouncil.org.

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About the Iowa Business Council

The Iowa Business Council (IBC) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization whose 22 members are the chief decision makers of major Iowa employers. One in six jobs in Iowa are tied to an IBC company. IBC member companies have invested billions of dollars of capital in Iowa's commercial infrastructure; lead the way in technology innovation, R&D, and grants procured; and are often the driving financial and volunteer forces behind philanthropic efforts all over the state.

IBC member companies include: Ruan Transportation Management Systems; Vermeer Corporation; Iowa Bankers Association; Alliant Energy; Casey's General Stores, Inc.; Corteva Agriscience; Deere & Company; Fareway; FBL Financial Group, Inc.; HNI Corporation; Hy-Vee, Inc., Kent Corporation; Mercy Health Network; Meredith Corporation; MidAmerican Energy; Pella Corporation; Principal; Rockwell Collins; The Weitz Company; The University of Iowa Health Care; UnityPoint Health; Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Iowa; and Wells Enterprises, Inc.