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Central Maine Growth Council becoming catalyst for the region's economic success

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Central Maine Growth Council (CMGC) was without an executive director for several months, but that changed in July when Darryl Sterling came on board and set up a new office at 50 Elm St. And in the two and a half months that have followed, CMGC's energy level has definitely been kicked up a notch.

Sterling has already taken steps to position CMGC as the catalyst for the region's economic success with a re-energized board of directors.

After relocating the office to the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce, came the launch of a new organizational tagline, "Growing A Strong Regional Economy," which is displayed on CMGC's new signage and marketing materials.

The organization has now begun work on its immediate goal of developing a strategic plan with action steps which will be completed by January, 2012.

Over the last two months, Sterling has met with several area businesses and business leaders, developers and financiers, academic institutions, nonprofit agencies and local, regional, state, and federal officials to inventory the area's economic assets and growth potential.

"As I became more familiar with my surroundings, I began looking at Central Maine with a 'fresh eyes' approach," Sterling said. "I discovered the area has a wow factor," he said. "Waterville/Oakland/Winslow/Fairfield or WOWF."

The area has an outstanding quality of life with its culture, education, recreation, business, and community offerings - and it's economically percolating with new and expanding companies, jobs, training, and tremendous investment opportunities, he explained.

"As I look at innovative ways to market the area, I noticed that square foot for square foot, there appears to be more commercial/industrial companies in WOWF than in any other area of the state," he said.

Sterling has been looking into development priorities and growing businesses and jobs through projects like Hathaway Creative Center, First Park, Head of Falls, Fairfield-Waterville Industrial Rd. Connector and positioning Robert LaFleur Municipal Airport to become a vital piece to the region's economic growth.

Other collaborations are also being strengthened with Colby College, Thomas College, KVCC, and area high schools to provide educational options for the area's workforce. He is also enhancing partnerships with the Mid-Maine Chamber, KVCOG, Waterville Development Corp, First Park, Workforce Investment Board, the Kennebec Entrepreneurial Network, and others to do integrated marketing.

Sterling also believes there is great potential to establish successful community energy districts which can provide mid-Maine a competitive advantage in lower cost power for businesses and

residents.

He added that the region could be developed as a center for agriculture to complement the Goodwill-Hinckley project for regional food sustainability and security. Ultimately, Mid-Maine could achieve "economic thrive-ability" as it develops more markets for local growers and value-added food processing, he added.

On a larger scale, Sterling said CMGC goals include securing two new or expanding companies in the area adding 50-100 jobs in six months. After that, the goal will be to recruit several more companies adding 1,000 jobs by 2014.

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