

## **Connecting the Dots**

In an effort to continue its mission of empowering the local entrepreneurial community, The Exchange sponsored a presentation on March 18 entitled “What can 124 North Market Do For You?” The presentation was held at Smokey Row. (For upcoming presentations and more information about The Exchange for Entrepreneurs, visit [www.theexchangeoskaloosa.com](http://www.theexchangeoskaloosa.com).)

The four organizations housed at 124 North Market in Oskaloosa – MCDG, OACDG, MCARD, and Main Street – provided a synopsis of their services and opportunities for those in attendance. The common thread presented was “If you have a question, call. If we can help, we will. What’s important? Contacts, community, and involvement.”

Valinn McReynolds, OACDG Director said, “I attempt to bring everyone together by listening to what needs may be available and then offer location suggestions and resources available which may be able to fit those needs.” Andrew Jensen, MCDG Director said, “It all comes back to making those connections.”

All four organizations help in the process of connecting the dots, finding answers through different services and connections in an effort to improve the quality of life and sustainability of the Mahaska Community.

Though they work well together, the four offices located at 124 North Market (also known as the Chamber Building) are separate organizations. Continue reading for a synopsis of their mission and activities. Additional information can also be found on-line ([www.oacdg.org](http://www.oacdg.org)).

### **MCDG – Director Andrew Jensen, 641.672.2591 ext. 226 or 515.314.1713**

- The mission of MCDG (Mahaska Community Development Group) is to continue building a coalition of entities in the region to further economic development and promote a healthy, business-friendly environment.
- There are no specific resources in the MCDG office, but it is heavy on connections throughout the community and the state.
- MCDG applies its mission to business retention and expansion, recruitment, as well as focusing on non-traditional avenues like housing and supporting creative endeavors like The Exchange

### **Main Street – Director Karen Hafner, 641.673.7629 ext. 228**

- Oskaloosa is one of the five original Main Street Communities.
- The program utilizes a four-point approach (Organization, Promotion, Design, and Business Improvement) to provide economic development opportunities for the downtown district.

- Community events (i.e. Sweet Corn Serenade, Art on the Square, Lighted Christmas Parade) are organized through the Main Street office including the newest event “Christmas in July.”
- A market analysis created through the Main Street office (available for review) provides market indicators that help with business development, information about the market size, and market shortages.
- Building information is available through the office: who owns what, condition, size, what buildings are available for development.
- There are main opportunities to volunteer through the Main Street office. Getting involved helps build local connections in a soft and positive way. There are also great connections in Main Street Iowa through the local office.

**MCARD – Director Deann DeGroot, 641.672.2591**

- MCARD (Mahaska County Agricultural and Rural Development) works with smaller cities and small business start-ups.
- Resources include Mahaska County Revolving Loan fund which currently has \$300,000. MCARD provides grant assistance and has also helped with some SBA loans and related opportunities.
- Activities include working with MYP, local branding efforts, area tourism, job fairs, providing information about IowaWorks to local businesses, working with Workforce Development, and an eight-county development area.
- MCARD has access to a variety of free opportunities for business start-ups including free help with writing business plans through SBA and stressed more than once there are a lot of moving parts going on at 124 North Market but all of the offices are there to help.

**OACDG – Director Valin McReynolds, 641.673.7629 ext. 223 or 888.562.6759**

- The OACDG (Oskaloosa Area Chamber & Development Group) is a membership-based organization with 350 members.
- The mission of OACDG is to promote, improve, and enhance the business environment and quality of life in Oskaloosa and Mahaska County.
- The office works with individuals business owners, works to address their needs, be involved with the community, meet with leaders and stakeholders and promote the community on all fronts: recruitment, retention, tourism.
- Though the board of directors is an elected board through the membership, various Chamber committees are always looking for volunteers. Committees include the areas of commerce, tourism, scholarship, promotions/events, retail development, diplomat, design, awards, and business improvement.
- The chamber helps with referrals of their membership when services are requested. They also help promote smaller businesses that aren’t as visible as they’d like to be.
- Not being a chamber member will not exclude getting help, having questions answered, or making connections (though membership is and will be encouraged).