

The Development Authority of Polk County is looking to continue a trend of bringing big business to the area, but also keep what is already here through a variety of new programs as Terry Schwindler took over the organization in the fall of 2019.

The change in leadership brings with it renewed opportunities to grow relationships between existing industries, bring in new partners and hopefully find someone to take over the SPEC building that has remained up for sale since 2014.

One of the highest priorities of the organization for 2020 is to find a buyer for the 100,000 square feet of industrial space in Cedartown, and be able to move onto a new project.

Schwindler will use her previous experience in Putnam County where she headed up their development authority by also heading off to trade shows and conferences to talk up the building.

"We have a wonderful relationship with state project managers who send possible buyers our way when our building matches up with what they need," April Lucas, DAPC Project Manager of Existing Industries, said.

Schwindler has spent a good portion of her time in her first 90 days on the job and into 2020 visiting with existing industry partners and revitalizing programs the DAPC already hosted, like their Manufacturer's Roundtable hosted on a quarterly basis.

The DAPC is going to increase the number of Roundtable events to help keep up with issues each industry is facing, and focus on networking and problem solving during the gatherings.

"We are encouraging an atmosphere of openness, honesty, mentoring and sharing ideas that have been successful," Lucas said.

Manufacturer's Roundtables will bump up their schedule in 2020 to every other month meetings that started in January, with the next one coming up in March. Those business leaders within local industries who would like to participate can contact Lucas at 770-684-5686 to learn more.

Alongside the Roundtable events, the DAPC is also launching a series of Lunch and Learns to help industries connect with resources and more. They held one in recent weeks at the start of the month, and will be back on the schedule of every other month in April. The goal is to help provide innovative ideas to benefit industries locally, like in the way they structure their taxes or with new information about human resources.

Intergovernmental Roundtables are also being brought back by the DAPC in an effort to increase communication between industry leaders and between local officials from the cities and counties. Lucas said the goal is to share issues and solutions among entities and avoid conflicts.

Officials have also been getting more involved in the area of Workforce Development in the past months, getting involved with the Polk County College and Career Academy and their efforts to recruit existing industries to grow partnerships and provide internship, apprentice and job programs for PCCCA students.

With the economic fortunes of the county looking brighter than ever with low unemployment and investment in business and housing being made and announced in past months, workforce development will be key factor in 2020 and years to come to attract industrial growth as well.

Especially with unemployment at all time record lows — 2.9 percent before adjustments for two months in a row as 2019 was closing out — the need for workers is growing by the day.

Among the ways that the DAPC expects to ensure they are marketing the county to business on a global scale is via their online presence.

The DAPC is also in the process of putting together a new website to highlight the reasons why new industries should come to Polk County, and provide information for existing industries as well. The hope is that it can act as a more specific marketing tool to recruit and retain industries.

“Our website will highlight the wonderful aspects of living and working in Polk County, and will also feature regular spotlights on all of our existing industries,” Lucas added.

These efforts come just in the first few months of Schwindler being on the job and Lucas shifting her role to focus on existing industries within the county.

Schwindler, who was hired to replace former CEO and President Missy Kendrick, moved to Polk from her job in Putnam County. Prior to that, she served as Manager of Business and Industry for the Macon Economic Development Authority.

Schwindler holds a Bachelor’s degree from the BSBA in Marketing University of Florida and an Master’s in Business Administration and Marketing from Kennesaw State University.