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New Ulm "Economic Development at the corner of history and progress"

May 8, 2014
The Journal

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To the editor:

Some things don't change. New Ulm is still known for its German heritage, beer and festivals like Bavarian Blast.

But recently, New Ulm is experiencing an economic development renaissance. We have new housing going in, the New Ulm Medical Center just completed a clinic expansion, a new Menard's store has opened on the west side, and our Runnings store just moved into a larger space - over 100,000 square foot of ag supplies, garden center and sporting goods. Gallery 512 and Semblance clothing boutiques have opened in the last 12 months in our historic downtown and many of our manufacturers have good paying jobs available. Independent School District 88, home of the two-time State Girls Softball Champion teams, has a referendum on the ballot in August for the creation of a new high school complex. So what's the problem?

Amidst all of the local initiatives, our community is depending on the state to make the necessary upgrades for HWY 14 to be a four lane corridor from New Ulm to Rochester. We've made piecemeal progress, but there never seems to be enough money to finish the job.

For almost five decades, the cities and regional centers on this road have continued to thrive despite having the card of HWY 14 in their hand. Today's trucks are made to be more efficient at higher speeds. Four-lane roads are required by companies looking to expand. If a community doesn't have four-lane access, you don't even make the list even though you have a great workforce, other manufacturers in the area, terrific schools and enviable quality of life.

We know HWY 14 isn't the only project in this predicament. The Corridors of Commerce program that was started last year and championed by Representative Frank Hornstein was designed to build capacity and address missing links on Minnesota's highway corridors. It provided the opportunity to complete long-overdue highway expansion projects like HWY 14. In 2013, \$330 Million was put into this program to keep some of these projects moving forward, including three projects along HWY 14. Sadly, in 2014, no money as of yet, has been designated for the Corridors of Commerce. New Ulm was really hoping that the drive behind our local economic development would be matched with momentum from the state to continue to improve important highway corridors.

They say, "when life hands you lemons, make lemonade." With everything going on in New Ulm, we think we've made lemonade, lemon curd, lemon pie, lemon bars and lemon cake. We want a road.

Audra Shaneman

President / CEO

New Ulm Area

Chamber of Commerce

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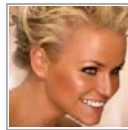
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