



BEYOND THE BORDERS

Community Economic Development and Leadership Online Newsletter

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Building Communities

Practical Tools and Information

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This newsletter is meant to share practical tools and information to assist you in your important role in community and economic development work. We welcome comments on current letters plus encourage your advice for future articles.

Kathy

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Editorial – Leadership Does Matter!!!

I've heard them and suspect you have, too, those comments something like "the strong will survive" and "some are just meant to die." They're talking about our rural communities. It's not a given that just because a community is small, it can't be successful. Communities with connected, caring citizens can thrive. Just look at some of the successful small, rural towns in North Dakota! They struggle, yes, but they do much better than other communities of comparable size and resources. What do these North Dakota communities have that makes such a difference? Is it effective local leadership?

Successful communities may not recognize how much effort went into building the foundation necessary for their present growth in economic and

community development. The planning and visioning probably were done years ago, so they are not recognized now for their contribution. All communities are different, of course, but a consistent characteristic of successful communities is a group of locally committed people working together toward a shared vision for the community. Those citizens are brought together by community leaders.

I suppose that communities can be lucky, but I would rather rely on the research of leadership scholars such as Margaret Mead, who said, *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”*

Sincerely,
Kathy Tweeten
NDSU Center for Community Vitality Director &
Community Economic Development Extension Specialist
P.S. Please see the Rural Leadership North Dakota article below for training available in ND if you would like to fine tune your leadership skills.

RCS Rural Services Available

Source: Tom Schiwal, Vocational Rehabilitation Consulting and Services

Agriculture is more than just an industry in North Dakota; it is a way of life. The agricultural community in North Dakota is facing a number of issues, among them challenging economic conditions and an aging population. RCS (Rehabilitation Consulting and Services) Rural Services are designed to help North Dakota farmers and ranchers and their spouses, working dependents and employees who have a permanent injury, illness or impairment to continue working independently. Some common examples are arthritis; problems with knees, shoulders or backs; hearing or vision problems; diabetes; asthma; or heart conditions. Once someone applies for assistance, a RS representative will travel to the farm or ranch and work with the operator to identify solutions that will allow the person to continue working independently. Examples of solutions RCS Rural Services can provide are grain bin lid openers, tractor or truck step extensions, handle grab bars, gate openers and roll tarps. For more information, contact Trina Gress at (701) 328-8805 or (800) 862-7342.

North Dakota Nature & Rural Tourism Association Off and Running

Source: Marty Anderson, Nature & Tourism Association Chair (March 31, 2005)

Fellow North Dakotans,
Our state is entering an exciting time for nature and rural tourism, but we need your help to define the future of this industry and our state's image. Six meetings were held across the state this past month in response to Marty's request for input, but it's not too late to become part of this dynamic movement.

As Marty said, “North Dakota has a great opportunity to enhance the economic diversity of agriculture and rural areas by inviting visitors to share our heritage and culture.” The North Dakota Nature & Rural Tourism Association was created to help new and existing businesses grow their business.

For more information on the goals of the association and to join, go to www.ndnature.org.

Rural Leadership North Dakota Accepting Participant Applications

Source: Marie Hvidsten, NDSU Extension Rural Leadership Specialist

Leadership is the key to securing a successful future for North Dakota. The state needs leaders with innovative ideas to strengthen rural communities.

Rural Leadership North Dakota is designed for North Dakotans who have a desire to learn more about themselves and their community, state, nation and world. Program participants will attend eight three-day seminars throughout the state and go on one six-day study tour to Washington, D.C. The seminars are on topics such as leadership, communication, culture and heritage, creative and critical thinking, project management, understanding the political system, resource management and civic engagement.

Participants also create and implement a project in their organization and /or community that allows them to practice the skills they have learned.

Networking is an important part of the RLND program. The program will create a network of concerned and committed citizens. If you are interested in joining this exciting group of people, go to www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/rlnd or call (701) 231-5803 for your application form. Applications must be received by July 1, 2005.

“Why Didn’t I Think of That?” by Wally Eide

Source: Wally Eide, Director, North Dakota Ag Innovation Center (end of series)

Protecting Your Idea

I haven’t talked much about patents up to this point. My personal opinion is that patents are overrated. This is why: If you study the history of the patent system, the early purpose was to discourage secrecy. That’s right; our forefathers’ intent was for inventors to disclose their inventions so that other people could use their technology. Don Debelak, in his book “*Bringing Your Product to Market*,” gives a great example. “A new development in rifle-sight technology could, through information disclosed in a patent, eventually be incorporated into microscope equipment. In return for helping other inventors, a patent was awarded to the original inventor. He could then sue anyone who, without permission, tried to market or manufacture the original product.”

The problem seems to arise from the interpretation of the word “novel.” To receive a patent, you are supposed to have a product that is novel or unique. Novel, if you look it up in the dictionary, doesn’t just mean different, it means unprecedented. Patents all have claims, and generally the more claims, the stronger the patent. It appears to me that if you are very clever in your wording of the claims, you can convince the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office that your idea also is novel enough to receive a patent.

One of the preliminary considerations for getting a patent is to determine whether you are owner of the invention with the rights to seek and obtain patent protection for the idea. This may prove to be an easy question to answer for most readers, but you must consider how the idea was formulated, with whom the concept was discussed and how the first prototype was built to be sure no one else can claim inventorship of any part of the invention. When other people who could claim a hand in coming up with or refining the original concept are involved, they need to be included as co-inventors on the patent application. Figure out these details early on so if your idea is a huge market success, you won’t have to deal with these issues later.

Most inventors don’t understand what a patent is supposed to do for them. Many suppose if they get a patent, no one can produce anything even remotely similar. But that’s not correct. Think I’m wrong? The next time you go into a large department store, pick a product and look at the competing products. Each product has a patent number; do they all look like novel ideas from one another? What patents do accomplish is that they give the inventor the right to sue someone who makes or sells their *specific* product design.

Patents do have their place. Strong patents can be very valuable. Valuable patents are those in which claims are very broad or detail the most effective or only way an invention can work. Patents have other benefits as well. They may delay competitive product introductions. In many cases, you might not be able to sell or

license your idea without one.

Ask yourself if you are going to be willing to defend your patent aggressively. I will guarantee you that if your idea is indeed novel and is a market success, you will have competitors. Ask yourself that if you are going to produce this product, will a patent produce enough additional sales to pay for itself? It really should be an economic decision on your part. What do you estimate to be the life span of your product? Is it likely to be around for a while or is it a consumer item with some emotional appeal and is gone by the next shopping season? Toys come to mind as examples: talking toys, toys you tickle. Just keep an eye on the TV the next holiday season and you will see more examples. If you anticipate a short product life span, you may not want to go to the expense of a patent.

Patents aren't cheap. If you are using a patent attorney, the attorney probably will start at around \$3,000 and go up from there. The most expensive patent I personally am familiar with was more than \$60,000. That particular patent dealt with a sophisticated biotechnology process.

Can you apply for a patent yourself? Yes, you can, and I've known some people who have written and received them. The learning curve was high and it took a long time. The last time I talked to one of them, he said "When I first got my patent, I was so proud of it I wouldn't have taken a million dollars for it. Now, I'll take a \$100,000." Several self-help "patent it yourself" books are on the market. If you don't think you will be able to get significant protection for your idea from a patent, you may want to consider this route. If you truly have a novel idea with a significant number of claims, I strongly would encourage you to use a patent attorney.

You have other ways of protecting your idea that may work under certain circumstances. You can get a copyright on something you publish, such as book or a song, instructions, a graphic design, etc. Copyrights are considerably less expensive than a patent. For more information about copyrights, visit the U.S. Copyright Office Web site at www.copyright.gov/.

A trademark, or "mark," is any word, phrase, symbol, design, sound, smell, color, product configuration, group of letters or numbers, or combination of these that a company adopts and uses to identify its products or services, and distinguishes them from products and services that others make, sell or provide.

The primary purpose of marks is to prevent consumers from becoming confused about the source or origin of a product or service. Marks help consumers answer the questions: "Who makes this product?" and "Who provides this service?"

As consumers become familiar with particular marks and the goods or services they represent, marks can acquire a "secondary meaning" as indicators of quality. Thus, established marks help consumers answer another question: "Is this product or service a good one to purchase?" For this reason, the well-known marks of reputable companies are valuable business assets, worthy of nurturing and protection. For more information about trademarks, visit www.uspto.gov/.

There also are trade secrets and these are most generally for processes, ingredient, etc. Most often you hear about trade secrets when referring to recipes for soft drinks, cookies, chicken and the like.

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