

## COMMUNITY FORUM FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT A REVIEW OF THE YEAR, November 2011

The Community Forum seeks to promote economic development, the process of increasing living standards and opportunities for area residents. Through education, organizing, and advocacy we intend to promote social and economic equity and to open up the economic process to greater democratic participation.

The Community Forum probably is best known for regular public meetings that provide an opportunity to "shine the light" on the myriad of issues that affect local economic development. During the past year, we have either sponsored or co-sponsored the following public meetings and forums.

### *Public meetings and forums, 2011*

January, 2011 – An Update on **Redevelopment in LaSalle Square**, with Jeff Gibney, SB Director of Community & Economic Development, as our guest.

The focus of the February meeting was South Bend's **Urban Enterprise Zone**.

Speakers included Pam Meyer & Phil D'Amico from the Urban Enterprise Association, City Councilman Oliver Davis, and Glenn Williams from the Michiana African American Chamber of Commerce.

March 26 was the date of our Sixth Annual Forum: "The **2011 Indiana Legislative Session**, How will it affect economic development in St. Joseph County?"

The agenda at our April meeting addressed two topics. Sara Stewart shared "What's new this year at the **LaSalle Square Unity Garden**?" A second discussion reviewed suggestions about **small business development** from the March forum and examined possibilities for follow-up activities.

In May we partnered with six other community organizations and agencies to host the meeting, "Planning for the Future: How will **government cut-backs** affect you?"

June's Public Forum, "The Coming and Going of **A. J. Wright**," we heard and discussed presentations from Don Inks, SB Community & Economic Development, Oliver Davis, SB Common Council and Rebecca Ruvalcaba from La Casa de Amistad.

Our August meeting focused on South Bend's new **Minority and Women Business Enterprise Development Program**. Common Councilman Timothy Rouse was our guest.

In September, the topic was proposed Indiana "**Right to Work**" legislation, with presentations by State Senator Karen Tallian, from Portage, Bob Warnock III, President of Teamsters Local 364, and Marty Wolfson, Director of Notre Dame's Higgins Labor Studies Program.

October's Public Forum, "**Utility Costs: Hard Times May Get Harder on Indiana Residents**," featured Kerwin Olson from Citizens Action Coalition of Indiana and Dawn Chapla from the United Way of St. Joseph County.

Finally, on November 15 we co-sponsored, along with six other labor and community groups, "**The Jobs Crisis & the Threat to Our Living Standards**."

## *Organizing and Advocacy, 2011*

### **1. Responsible use of tax abatement:**

During the first half of 2011, the Community Forum continued to work, through the Coalition for Responsible Tax Abatement, for the revision of South Bend's Tax Abatement Ordinance. An alternative revision was proposed by Project Future and the Chamber of Commerce and numerous meetings and discussions compared and contrasted the two proposals until June 13<sup>th</sup>, when the SB Council effectively decided to postpone further consideration of the tax abatement issue until after the municipal elections.

In preparation for these elections, we developed a candidates' survey that addressed the use of tax abatement. The responses to survey questions was posted on the CFED Blog and led to questions about tax abatements at most of the many candidate forums throughout April.

### **2. Economic Equity:**

At the end of January, we organized a community meeting in response to a proposed revision of South Bend's Affirmative Action Ordinance and mobilized participation at a January 31<sup>st</sup> public meeting called by the Common Council's Community and Economic Development Committee.

The new ordinance, which was adopted on July 23, established a Diversity Utilization Board that is charged with developing a plan for the utilization of WBEs (women business enterprises) and MBEs (minority business enterprises) in South Bend. The Community Forum continues to monitor the work of the DUB as well as the implementation of the Diversity Utilization Ordinance.

### **3. Participation in community efforts to save, grow and sustain LaSalle Square:**

- Saving the LaSalle Branch Library
- Participating on the LaSalle Square Steering Committee
- Supporting the Urban Garden Market at LaSalle Square

### **4. Planning, Technical Assistance, and Service to sustain the area's safety net:**

- Participation on the United Way Financial Stability Committee
- Extensive service in VITA, providing Volunteer Income Tax Assistance for low-income residents

### **5. Other activities**

- The CFED was a sponsor of last January's Little Taste of Peace program.
- MLK Day activities (Breakfast and participation in the Day of Celebration)
- Establishment of a "Small Business Development Group"
- A co-sponsor of the "We Are One" March and Rally on April 4.
- Members of the CFED monitored South Bend's 2012 Budget meeting.