

State leaders praise Jeff. County on job well done ¹⁻²⁷⁻²⁰¹²

BY ANDREW MILLER
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Several local state congressmen and several representatives of federal congressmen commended the citizens and organizations of Mt. Vernon and Jefferson County Thursday night for the hard work the citizens and organizations have done to improve and prosper the community.

The Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce held an Economic Development Informational Summit at Cedarhurst Center for the Arts. The summit was a chance for community members to interact with state legislators and other representatives of federal government. The panel members answered submitted questions from the audience members, made up of Chamber members.

The panel consisted of Mayor Mary Jane Chesley; County Board Chairman Robert White; Mike Hall, a representative of Congressman John Shimkus; Randy Pollard, a representative of Sen. Mark Kirk; Bill Houlihan, a representative for Sen. Dick Durbin; Sen. John O. Jones; Sen. Dave Luechtefeld; and Rep. John Cavaletto.

Illinois Lt. Governor Sheila Simon offered glowing remarks for the community. She said the most exciting part of the growth of the community is how it's being done, with people working together who previously didn't. She said she hopes the job being done in Mt. Vernon and Jefferson County can be replicated throughout the state.

Chesley presented a slide show highlighting numerous ongoing projects and completed projects, including work on both Good Samaritan Hospital and Crossroads Community Hospital, the Interstate 57 Exit 94 interchange, Continental Tire expansion and new businesses such as Kohl's and the new Pepsi Distribution/Service Center. She said the first tires coming out of the

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new \$224 million Continental Tire expansion came out in October, well ahead of schedule.

She updated the audience on when Crossroads' expansion should be done, which is scheduled to be completed on or around Aug. 15. She said the resurfacing of Broadway from 17th Street to 27th Street will begin in the spring. She presented a slide that said unemployment in Jefferson County is down from the past two years. She said the city receives close to \$5 million annually from outside sources to help improve infrastructure, fire department and police department operations, and downtown development programs, among other uses.

Sen. Jones said the citizens of Jefferson County should be commended for the work they have done to improve the county. He said the passing of the referendum for the new Mt. Vernon Township High

School was a great plus for the area, stating education needs to be important. He said he was proud of the new K-3 Primary Center in town. He also said good things are going to continue for Mt. Vernon.

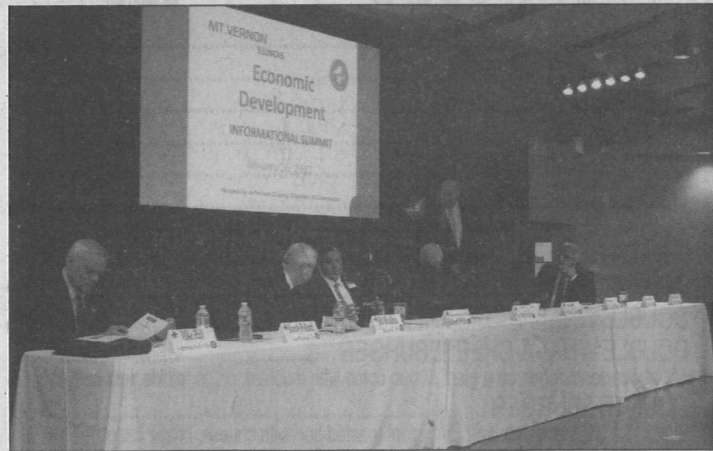
Houlihan said the new businesses and opportunities that are in Jefferson County now are a product of working together. "You do a very good job of being bipartisan," he said. Sen. Luechtefeld said, "It appears [Mt. Vernon and Jefferson County] are headed in the right direction."

White and Chesley noted the important programs at Rend Lake College — health care courses, mining technology courses and welding courses — and Mt. Vernon Township High School vocational programs, biomedical program, the career and technical education courses that prepare students immediately for job openings in the area.

"We need to let folks know there are a lot of positive things going on," White said.

Chesley said those courses allow students to train for real jobs. "All of those are going to come into play," she said.

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Sentinel Photo/ANDREW MILLER

IN PREPERATION — Panel members of the Economic Development Informational Summit put on by the Mt. Vernon Chamber of Commerce prepare for the summit Thursday night at Cedarhurst Center for the Performing Arts. The panel discussed the many things going right for Jefferson County and Mt. Vernon, as well as several ways to improve the community.

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