

Waterfront communities hire marketing director

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By Lisa Gervais, For The Macomb Daily

Chesterfield Township was the final piece of the puzzle in a tourism development program that county officials hope will draw more visitors, businesses — and money — to the Lake St. Clair area.

The township will be one of four shoreline communities chipping in \$5,000 per year to help pay for a marketing representative to promote water tourism and economic development. New Baltimore and St. Clair Shores, along with Chesterfield and Harrison townships, recently signed a three-year contract. They're hoping the position, created through a collaboration between the Macomb County Board of Commissioners and Michigan State University, will utilize the natural resource to bolster economic development.

Kristin Grifka, former head of Michigan State University Extension in Macomb County, will take on the new role as Lake St. Clair Recreation and Tourism Program leader. Her duties will include increasing tourism as well as bringing jobs and business growth to the area and improving the quality of life.

She said she'd already begun working with community leaders in the municipalities that had already signed on.

"I'm trying to leave that loose because I do want to make sure I'm facilitating what your goals are for your community," she told the Chesterfield Township Board of Trustees.

The Macomb County Board of Commissioners and Michigan State University will cover the majority of Grifka's \$73,730 salary; MSU will pay for half and 30 percent will come from the county.

County Commissioner Brian Brdak said the collaboration was borne out of necessity.

"We are still projecting for next year, for 2011, after balancing the last two years' budgets, that we will probably have a \$23 million deficit," Brdak said. "It's very important that communities such as the county and (Chesterfield) engage in collaborations with organizations like MSU Extension in order to continue to provide services to our residents and businesses."

Stephen N. Cassin, Macomb County's director of planning and economic development, said a study to determine the focus of Macomb County's economic development efforts revealed that financial incentives weren't the only factors businesses weighed when choosing a location for their operations.

"One of the top things businesses told us was quality of life," Cassin said. "This means trails, water resources, the river and the lake."

Chesterfield Township contributing \$5,000 per year for the next three years did not sit well with resident Joe Miller, who said that despite objections he expected the board to "rubber stamp" the agreement.

"Michigan State, they've got professors that don't teach, they do research and they're publishing with six-figure salaries," he said. "I have a dim view of any new position created in this time of economic difficulty in Chesterfield."

Trustee Cheryl Printz said collaboration is how municipalities will survive.

"This is the way we need to go in government —to do more collaborations and less of everybody having their own little kingdom," she said. "This saves everybody money in the long run and it's something we need in these economic times ... it's a good resource for all communities and it will be a great benefit to us."

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