

Good for business

By Lee Filas Daily Herald Staff Writer
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Fox Lake residents and officials alike have all but gushed over a proposed 93-room hotel and water park slated to be built over the next five years on busy Route 12.

Don Peeples of Peeples Business Development, Inc., has been praised for bringing the idea to **Fox Lake**. However, the village board has said that a portion of that praise should go to Claude LeMere, village community development coordinator.

LeMere logged more than 1,000 hours in phone calls to bring Peeples into contact with the numerous property owners involved with the site.

He also personally worked to bring Peeples to **Fox Lake**, rather than letting another community get the project.

However, LeMere said, the work he did on the hotel - as well as the countless other projects he's been involved in - is all part of the job for the office of community development.

"The job of this office is to recruit business in this village," LeMere said. "We bring people here and see if they want to invest. Peeples was part of that process."

Since coming to **Fox Lake** two years ago, LeMere has been involved in countless redevelopment projects.

Some of those projects include the sale of Lakeland Plaza at the corner of Grand and Rollins Road, the creation of Lakefront Park on Nippersink Road, the addition of a farmers market on Grand Avenue, and the relocation of the village hall to Thillen Drive.

All of those projects have one thing in common, LeMere said. They all center around bringing a downtown district back to its once prominent stature.

LeMere said that was the goal of his office since coming to **Fox Lake**.

"The history here was of a resort town, a place where people would spend their vacations," LeMere said. "That's a huge responsibility for us. People are trusting us with their one- or two-week vacation every year. That's why we need to bring this town back to what it once was."

Trustee Ed Bender credits the community development director for working diligently to fill Lakeland Plaza with shops, including the return of a small grocery store to the downtown district.

"The shopping center and the rest of the work he did at Lakeland Plaza was incredible for the village," he said. "But, that's why he was hired. This town had deteriorated economically from the '50s and '60s. When we came on board two years ago, there were too many vacancies."

High-Low Foods opened six months ago in Lakeland Plaza and replaced Pik-Kwik grocery store, which shut its doors about four years ago.

Senior residents living in one of two retirement communities around Lakeland Plaza clamored for a grocery store after Pik-Kwik closed. Bender and Mayor Nancy Koske promised residents that a small grocery store would return to the location.

Bender has worked with LeMere on many projects, including the three-person facility study team renovating the village community center into a new village hall. LeMere's annual \$65,000 salary has been a wise investment, he said.

"I think if he continues to develop the downtown and gets this hotel in, he will bring in a lot of business," Bender said. "That more than justifies his salary."

LeMere said his crowning achievements are the resurgence of the grocery store and the sale of Lakeland Plaza, but those highlights will be second when the hotel and water park opens on Route 12.

"This will do more for the village than anything else," LeMere said. "We gave Lake Geneva all of the business we had in the 1920s and '30s. Now, we want it back."