

# **SOUTHERN MICHIGAN BANK & TRUST LEADS HOMETOWN COMPETITIVENESS INITIATIVE**

Thanks to the generosity of Southern Michigan Bank & Trust, Branch County is one step closer to being a “competitive home town.” HomeTown Competitiveness is a rural economic development program that mobilizes local leaders, builds charitable assets, energizes entrepreneurs and attracts young people. Addressing these four strategies is proving to be successful in community and economic development efforts in small towns.

Locally the program is being headed by the Branch County Community Foundation, Branch County Area Chamber of Commerce, Branch County Economic Growth Alliance and the Coldwater Downtown Development Authority. Plans are underway to address the first priorities for the Branch County HomeTown Competitiveness which include business transition planning and leadership training with youth involvement.

Southern Michigan Bank & Trust and the Branch County Community Foundation announced on Wednesday, March 16 they would be changing the name of the Coldwater Community Reinvestment Fund within the Community Foundation to the Branch County HomeTown Competitiveness Fund. The purpose of the fund will also broaden to include investment in economic development and HomeTown Competitiveness initiatives throughout the county. Southern will also be making a donation to the fund to “kick-start” the program.

“Southern Michigan Bank & Trust, a long-time supporter of the Community Foundation, established this fund in 1999 to maintain the economic viability of downtown Coldwater, and has contributed each year to the fund. We’re very pleased they’ve again shown their foresight in making sure the entire county can benefit. Unlike governmental sources, charitable assets are flexible and adaptable when it comes to meeting local needs. Rather than trying to fit into someone else’s model,

we will be able to customize strategies that work in Branch County,” stated Community Foundation Executive Director Colleen Knight.

Southern Michigan President Kurt Miller remarked, “Southern Michigan Bank & Trust has been a part of Coldwater and Branch County since 1872. This is a great community, and we view the new HomeTown Competitiveness endeavor as a building block in the community’s economic development activity. I am confident that other businesses in the Branch County area will become partners in this venture as it moves forward.”

Any of the community partners – the Growth Alliance, Chamber, DDA or Community Foundation - may be contacted for more information on the initiative.

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