

Huntley leaders highlight growth at annual state of village event

Fire chief, District 158 superintendent also address Huntley Area Chamber of Commerce members

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[HUNTLEY](#) – Officials gave updates to Huntley Area Chamber of Commerce members Thursday on growth in the village, the school district, the fire district and more during the state of the village event.

Since 2011, Huntley has added 2,200 jobs and about 900 businesses registered in the community, Village Manager Dave Johnson said at the event, which was held at Huntley High School.

Property values are up as well. Huntley has seen a 32 percent increase in its equalized assessed value, Johnson said.

“I’ve worked for Crystal Lake way back in the day, so for me to see Huntley in the third rank in terms of overall value of land [in McHenry County], that’s pretty exciting, and it’s going to go nowhere but up,” Johnson said.

About \$1.3 billion has been sold in retail goods and services in the past five years in Huntley, Johnson said.

“We’ve seen a 32 percent increase from 2013 to 2017, so those numbers continue to go up, and it shows our economy is doing well,” Johnson said.

When looking at the former Huntley Outlet Center, Johnson said, the village does not yet have any plans for redevelopment, but it encourages new businesses to relocate there.

Owners of the former Huntley Outlet Center submitted applications to [rezone the lot](#) into office and industrial space, but Johnson previously said village staff hope to look at other options before making any decisions.

Village staff are working to recruit new businesses to the area, and they made 600 contacts in 2017, including restaurants, anchor stores, hotels, automobile dealerships and

tenants for the former Catty Corp. property.

“We’ve thrown some pretty big numbers incentive-wise to kick off a gas station, but we’re still chasing. We’re working on it,” Johnson said.

The village bought the [Catty Corp. site](#) as part of an effort to revitalize the downtown area, and it has reached out to 20 breweries and 19 developers so far.

Huntley doesn’t have enough vacant spaces to meet the business demand, Johnson said, and building new spaces is expensive.

“It’s a long race. I wish it was as easy as snapping our fingers and getting someone to build a new building,” Johnson said. “One of the challenges is, besides the outlet mall, we don’t have a lot of vacant space. The challenge we have is the lack of space ... and if we build new, it’s extremely costly.”

New businesses coming

[Jewel-Osco has announced plans](#) to renovate its existing store on the south side of the village and build a 62,000-square-foot store at Reed Road and Route 47, investing \$18 million into the community.

Panera Bread, [Panda Express](#), [Verizon Wireless](#) and [O’Reilly Auto Parts](#) also will be joining Huntley. General RV is planning an expansion with space that formerly was part of the Huntley Outlet Center.

Resort Lifestyle Community is constructing Huntley Springs Retirement Community on a 9.6-acre site on Powers Road.

“For people looking to invest here, it’s extremely important to see activity on the east side so companies driving through here don’t go, ‘There’s a lot of cows out there still,’ ” Johnson said.

The downtown revitalization project is ongoing, and the village has partnered with businesses for its facade improvement program, investing \$955,000 into improvements.

The American Legion Post 673 of Huntley is expanding its facility for \$400,000, and the BBQ King is under construction on Coral Street, Johnson said.

Fire Protection District seeks
new station location

The Huntley Fire Protection District [no longer is looking](#) at moving its main headquarters to the long-vacant site off Route 47 and Mill Street, Fire Chief Scott Ravagnie said.

Mike Skala, who owns Goodfella's Beef in Huntley, said he wants to turn the 17-acre property into a residential and commercial complex featuring four multistory housing buildings and four commercial buildings, and Johnson said the village will be reviewing those plans soon.

Ravagnie said the department will hire an outside firm to conduct a station location study after it outgrew its main headquarters. Ravagnie said the department has to be on the south side of the railroad tracks.

"As it gets busier and busier in the downtown area, it looks awesome, but the roads are smaller and there are delivery trucks that come, and engines and ambulances can't get by, so we are cutting around the tracks and going around the block," Ravagnie said. "As you guys know, every minute counts and every second counts."

The district already has enough money, so it won't need bonds or have to go to voters for additional tax dollars via referendum.

The existing headquarters, at 11808 Coral St., was built in 1959, and Ravagnie said he does not want to expand beyond four stations. Once the new headquarters is built, the department plans to sell its current space.

Huntley School District 158

Huntley School District 158 Superintendent John Burkey said the district is the second largest employer in McHenry County.

"They are not just here for a paycheck – they really care about the kids in this community and doing the best they can for the 9,500 kids that come in our doors every day," Burkey said.

Burkey said innovation is something the district continues to aim for, adding that [reports suggest](#) 83 percent of jobs paying less than \$20 an hour are considered likely to be replaced by automation in the future.

Huntley Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Sunday Graham presented Burkey with a certificate of appreciation for his time in Huntley. Burkey is leaving the

district, effective Jan. 31, to take a new job as executive director of the Large Unit District Association, a [lobbying organization](#) that represents the largest 53 unit districts in the state.

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