Written by George Browning
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It's all about connections. At least it is when talking about economic development. That's one reason Mayor David Bower and the City of Salem has teamed up with Radius Indiana.

Not only does the mayor hold a seat on the Radius Indiana board, he has invited the group into Washington County to help market the county and get the word out that Washington County is a great place to live and work.

Formed in 2009, Radius Indiana is a regional partnership representing 8 counties in South Central Indiana: Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Lawrence, Martin, Orange and Washington counties. The group also serves as a primary point of contact in Indiana for Crane.

"Radius Indiana is committed to strategically moving the economic growth and development of the 8 counties it represents forward, including Washington County," said Radius Indiana's CEO RJ Reynolds.

"Radius Indiana is working on key regional opportunities including dedicating resources to build collaborative teams and working with elected officials on the upcoming defense budget cuts and the Base Realignment and Closure process, which will not only affect NSA Crane, but its suppliers and small businesses in every county in our region."

Reynolds said that in addition, Radius Indiana focuses on the pillars of economic opportunity by promoting industries such as tourism, defense and manufacturing, as well as helping improve regional educational resources.

As part of Washington County's relationship with Radius Indiana, a director will be hired to help market the county through Radius Indiana's resources.

Bower called it a "short-term" project in which the city will pay $36,000 a year for a person to work on Washington County's behalf, helping to direct the county in how to better market the area and going out to find businesses that would be a good fit.

"This is half of what we were paying to the Economic Growth Partnership," said Bower. "I think this will turn into a good thing for our community. We are already experiencing good working relationships with the county, city and chamber of commerce. This will help us try something different for economic development."

Bower said he feels it is important to have someone from outside of Washington County to come in and look at things from a difference perspective.

"This person will be wired in," he added. "We won't be an outsider anymore when we go to these regional meetings."

Reynolds said, "Joe Timbrook has been a vital part of the Radius Indiana team, utilizing his marketing background, key community relationships, his strong project management and leadership skills to have a tremendous impact on the advancement of the Radius Indiana mission," he said. "Joe will work with City of Salem and Washington county officials to support local businesses, market the county's assets, and involve Washington County in ongoing regional growth and development strategies."

Bower said it is imperative to put together a strategic economic development plan, adding that the plan needs to include expectations of each other: Radius Indiana, City of Salem, the county, the chamber of commerce and the tourism board.

"We need to be clear and concise about the results we expect," he said. "We have been poor marketers of our community."

Bower said if Wal-Mart called tomorrow and wanted to come to the county there are few places for them to go.

“There is just no excuse for that,” he said.

Clerk-Treasurer Pat Persinger said she feels this partnership with Radius Indiana will be big for the county.

“We have to do something and this is a different perspective,” she said. “We may not see things someone from Radius may see.”

Persinger and Bower agreed that the community needs more brick and mortar to build the tax base to lower property taxes.

“For someone to think they can’t support economic development, they are cutting their nose off to spite their face,” said Bower.

Persinger added, “Everyone needs to get a positive outlook about Washington County.”

Bower said the county leadership has worked hard to change the mindset of residents and it’s time to market this community and get new businesses here.

“Radius Indiana is happy to support Washington County’s economic development efforts by sharing Joe Timbrook’s talents and resources to enhance the economic growth in that area,” said Reynolds.

Bower said he is excited about this partnership and looks for big things to happen in the near future.

“And, at the end of the day, if this doesn’t work, we’ll try something else!” he said.