



## Link Seeks To Balance Public Sector Funding With Private Contributions

By Kristin Mamrack

*Columbus-Lowndes Development Link Chief Executive Officer Joe Higgins (left) and Trust Co-Chair Bobby Harper (right) visit this morning with Larry J. Waller, Senior Vice President of Business Development for National Community Development Services, prior to the kick-off of the Link's five-year Trust fundraising and economic enhancement campaign. NCDS is conducting the campaign for the Link. The kickoff breakfast program was held at the Columbus Country Club.*

Likening the community to a football team's "booster club," Columbus-Lowndes Development Link Chief Executive Officer Joe Higgins this morning kicked off the organization's fundraising campaign for five more years of economic enhancement. Link officials hope to raise \$2,025,000 through The Trust campaign, a four-track strategy designed to move the organization away from primary dependence on public sector or government funding.

The Trust is "an exciting program to continue our focus to take us to the next level and continue our success," said Link Chairman Bart Wise. Already, \$1,517,500 has been raised.

"You can call it attitude, but I think that 'Yes, we can,' has replaced the 'No, we can't,'" Bobby Harper, a Trust co-chair said, borrowing a much-used phrase from presidential candidate Barack Obama, and using it to refer to economic developments in Lowndes County within the last few years, including the acquisition and development of two megasites and the arrival of the SeverCorr steel mill.

"The response we have received, calling on major organizations and businesses, to get us a good start, a leadership start on The Trust campaign has been inspiring," Harper added. "I think we will agree that success breeds success. You start liking success and you want it to continue." The four primary strategic initiatives of The Trust include, new business investment attraction - specifically, using aggressive and proven marketing techniques to identify and target specific industries to the Columbus-Lowndes County area - business assistance and expansion, community development and program management and investor relations.

Additionally, Harper noted a "very significant goal" of creating 1,500 new, "direct" jobs over the next five years and raising the average annual income to more than \$36,000. "This campaign is not simply about raising money," he said. "It is to confirm and validate that mentality that yes, we can, as we go forward. I think over the next five years, we're in store for a lot more yes, we can events."

"What has happened is a lot of y'all have decided to fly in the faith column," Higgins told a large group of business, government and community leaders assembled for the campaign kick-off. "This money is going to allow us to take things to the next level. "It's also going to bring balance to the Link that we so desperately need," he added of The Trust campaign, noting 75 percent of The Link's funding currently comes from "government entities."

With the new funds, Link officials plan to take delegates to visit corporate offices of companies like Baldor Electric, "crank up the volume" on recruiting and visit site consultants in Dallas, Texas, Chicago, Ill., and Atlanta, Ga. "We're going to be selling a success story," Higgins said. "We're going to go out and try to make more and more rain.

"The difference we're seeing in the community over a four- or five-year period is phenomenal," he continued. "We've got this thing to a point where we've got to decide what we're going to do. We've decided, as a group, to keep charging forward."

Plans for the funds also include acquiring more industrial property and building 100,000-square-foot "spec buildings," with the use of third party investors, Higgins said.

"You provide us the resources, you give us the bullets and we go out and shoot the big game," he concluded. "We're going to commit to you; we're going to make that happen."