

## **OUR OPINION: Siouxland Initiative at 25, Without question, a big success**

By the Journal Editorial Board

Possessed of vision and commitment, this metro area's private sector embarked on an ambitious plan, the Siouxland Initiative, 25 years ago to build economic strength within a spirit of tri-state cooperation. By any measure, the Initiative is a success. In fact, it's a model for other economic development organizations.

Formed by the Sioux City (today, the Siouxland) Chamber of Commerce in 1988 and administered by the Chamber, the Initiative is a private, nonprofit organization focused on building tri-state employment. In partnership with state and local governments, the Initiative works to attract new businesses and to grow and retain existing businesses.

Through the years, private and public investors have contributed tens of millions of dollars to the Initiative. The money is used for research, consulting, land purchases, low-interest loans and incentive packages.

Exceptions exist, but when an economic development deal goes down in our tri-state region, the Initiative likely is involved to one degree or another. Due in no small measure to its work, ours is a stronger, more vibrant, more diverse metro economy than it was 25 years ago.

For the third time in six years, for example, metro Sioux City this year topped Site Selection magazine's annual ranking of economic development activity in areas with populations of between 50,000 and 200,000. Some 45,000 corporate real estate executives subscribe to Site Selection.



*Gov. Terry Branstad, left, shakes hands with CF Industries CEO Steve Wilson at a Nov. 1, 2012, news conference announcing plans for a \$1.7 billion fertilizer plant expansion south of Sioux City, an economic development deal on which the Siouxland Initiative worked.*

In 2012, metro Sioux City boasted 23 qualified projects involving either the location of new or the expansion of existing businesses and industries.

To be included, projects must meet at least one of three criteria: capital investment of \$1 million or more, creation of a minimum of 50 new jobs or the addition of at least 20,000 square feet of new floor space.

"You blew away the competition," Ron Starnier, executive vice president of Atlanta-based Site Selection, told local business leaders in March.

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In May, the Initiative was recognized by Site Selection magazine as one of the 10 best-performing economic development organizations in the country, along with similar organizations in Austin and Houston, Texas, Baton Rouge, La., Greenville-Spartanburg, S.C., Atlanta, Ga., Mobile, Ala., Pittsburgh, Pa., and Salt Lake City, Utah.

Impressive company, indeed.

Private investors and public leaders throughout our tri-state region who have bought into the idea of working together form the Initiative foundation. Site Selection's Starner emphasizes the importance to our economic success of this

region's uncommon spirit of cross-border cooperation, something encouraged and facilitated by the Initiative since its beginning.

The prescient 1988 Initiative mission statement said: Successful implementation of the Siouxland Initiative will be no small task to be sure, but it is one that must be achieved; one that demands our best efforts - one that will reward those efforts many times over.

The results of the Initiative's first 25 years speak for themselves. This is an exciting time in our metro region; the future appears bright. We look forward with enthusiasm and optimism to the next 25 years.

