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**Officials confident local manufacturing will remain steady despite economic woes**

Timothy O'Connor

1-866-362-2167 Ext. 13860

[toconnor@heraldargus.com](mailto:toconnor@heraldargus.com)

LA PORTE - Despite the downturn in the nation's economy, local economic leaders say La Porte is positioned for economic growth.

Tim Gropp, executive director of the Greater La Porte Economic Development Corp., said the key for La Porte is the city's diverse manufacturing facilities.

It's a situation different from that of industry-specific communities like Flint, Mich., which suffered greatly when the auto industry decentralized in the 1980s.

Because of that diversity many of the area's manufactures are in industries immune to the current economic hurdles, said Gropp. He gave the example of New York Blower, which makes fans for a variety of uses, such as pollution control.

Further, Gropp said, the weakened U.S. dollar has made American manufacturing more attractive, resulting in an increase in exports.

The resistance to economic conditions has allowed many local companies to grow.

"Just about every company has added jobs or maintained their level," Gropp said.

Gropp isn't alone in seeing La Porte's manufacturing diversity as a

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boon. Mike Seitz, president of the greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce, said, "Some of our manufactures have sort of a unique niche or market that is still calling for a demand for their products.

"I think they're basically holding their own," he said.

One of those companies holding their own is Boss Industries, which makes equipment that aids utility crews.

"Even if demand is down you still have to maintain infrastructure," General Manager Paul Wilkins said. "Most of the companies we sell to are fairly recession proof."

Wilkins said the company has continually grown its employee base over the past five years, although they don't have plans to increase their workforce this year.

"Right now we're steady," he said.

Still, the city's economic future looks positive, according to Gropp and Seitz. The local unemployment rate sits at 5.1 percent, about average in Indiana, and the proposed new retail developments will bring businesses and jobs to the area.

"I think that the future looks good with NewPorte Landing and hopefully the intermodal (will be built)," Seitz said.



By Timothy O'Connor Boss Industries, located in the Th Rose Industrial Park in La Porte, has continually grown employee base over the past five years, according to Ge Manager Paul Wilkins.

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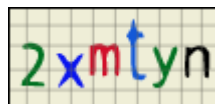
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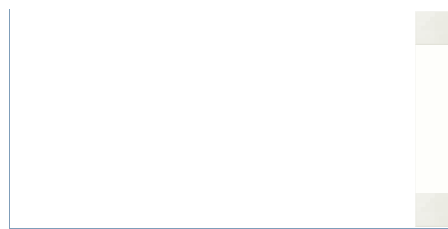
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