



**South Metropolitan**  
*Higher Education Consortium*

South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium  
202 S. Halsted Street  
Chicago Heights, IL 60411  
708/709.3764  
Southmetroed.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SUCCESS FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN THE SOUTHLAND AT THE  
GROWING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES TOGETHER CONFERENCE**

When asked how the conference was received, Dave Ward, Superintendent of Golf at Coyote Run Golf Course said, “For me, inspirational is the best description.” He went on to say moving forward, the hard part will be to “leverage the enthusiasm into a long-term movement to improve sustainability and the lives of the residents of the Chicago Southland.”

On Friday, February 8, the South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium (SMHEC) presented Growing Sustainable Communities Together a regional sustainability conference hosted by SMHEC Member Institution, Prairie State College. Over 100 guests attended the conference to expand sustainability efforts in the south suburbs. In a letter received by SMHEC, Congresswoman Robin Kelly showed her support for this event, by stating, “our communities can develop their own unique partnerships to successfully work together to grow sustainable communities.”

The day began with Edith Makra, Director of Environmental Initiatives for the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, as she discussed the Greenest Region Compact (GRC) and its impact in the south suburbs. Ms. Makra stated, “as of Tuesday evening, 109 municipalities have adopted the GRC.”

Following her keynote presentation, Ms. Makra facilitated a panel of local Mayors, including Mayor John Ostenburg of Park Forest, Mayor Paul Braun of Flossmoor and Mayor Rick Reinbold of Richton Park as they shared their community success stories as a result of adopting the GRC.

The day continued with breakout sessions on a variety of topics that fit within the GRC framework, including The Native Landscape, Building the Case for Sustainability: Zoning, Policy and the Built Environment, Urban Agriculture in the South Suburbs and Funding Opportunities. The conference featured speakers from organizations such as Cook County, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Forest Preserve District of Will County, F.U.T.U.R.E. Foundation, Homewood-Flossmoor Park District, Metropolitan Planning Council, Morton Arboretum, Oak Lawn Park District, Prairie State College, University of Illinois Extension and 360 Energy Group.

According to Alessandra Kummelehne, Executive Director for SMHEC, “The results of this conference are the essence of SMHEC’s link and leverage initiative - connecting people, communities and resources to make lasting improvements to South Cook County’s economy, ecology and social equity.” She continued saying, “I am honored to be a part of this initiative and I look forward to watching it grow as we work to improve the sustainability of our communities.”

The event was catered by Wiley’s Grill, a notable, local restaurant who brought in green alternatives such as compostable plates and cutlery to make the event more sustainable. The afternoon craft beer hour was sponsored by Vice District. Additional sponsors were ComEd, Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, Nania Energy, Village of Park Forest, and Wight and Co.

The South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium (SMHEC) is a unique partnership between two-year and four-year, public, private and for-profit higher education institutions in the south metropolitan area, extending south from the city of Chicago to the western border of Joliet, the southern border of Kankakee and east to the Illinois-Indiana state

line. The mission of the Consortium is for its members to collaborate to enhance educational services and programs in the region.

In 2014, SMHEC launched a regional effort to “link” and “leverage” community resources to make the Chicago southland the “greenest region.” Communities within SMHEC’s boundaries began meeting regularly to share success, identify areas of opportunities and leverage resources. In 2016, our key stakeholders made the decision to create three distinct sub-regions, identified through community college boundaries, to begin and expand sustainability efforts and the Prairie State/South Cook County region was created. Through these groups, this conference and many other initiatives, have been launched.

For more information about SMHEC or Link and Leverage, please contact Alessandra Kummelehne at [akummelehne@prairiestate.edu](mailto:akummelehne@prairiestate.edu).