

For Immediate Release

Contact: Alessandra Kummelehne
708/709.3764
akummelehne@prairiestate.edu

CELEBRATING SUSTAINABILITY IN WILL COUNTY

Edith Makra, Director of Environmental Initiatives for the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus stated she admired the “impressive display of sustainability innovation from Frankfort, Diamond and Homer Glen,” as she moderated a panel of civic leaders at a regional sustainability event. Ms. Makra praised the panel by stating, “your leadership on the Greenest Region Compact will help your peer communities relate and see the value in it.”

On Friday, April 5, the Will County Regional Sustainability Network (WCRSN), a program of the South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium (SMHEC) held the Greenest Region Compact: Stories in Will County event hosted by SMHEC Member Institution, Joliet Junior College. Over 40 guests attended the event to expand sustainability efforts in Will County.

The morning began with Dr. Judy Mitchell, President of Joliet Junior College as she welcomed the group to the College. In her opening, Dr. Mitchell acknowledged the importance of cross-community collaboration and reminded the audience of her commitment, along with her colleagues’ Dr. David Livingston of Lewis University and Dr. Arvid Johnson of the University of St. Francis, to sustainability and the communities they serve by signing the Will County Regional Sustainability Network Compact. Dr. Mitchell stated, “It is our formal commitment to link and align existing sustainability efforts in and around the Will County region, to build and leverage relationships between all stakeholders, and to establish an infrastructure to support the activities of the network.”

In the brief, but powerful welcome, Dr. Mitchell highlighted the recent sustainability successes at Joliet Junior College, stating, “Not only is sustainability one of our institutional Core Values, but energy efficiency and sustainability have been part of the culture of the campus community since the 1970s. Over the last nine years, the college has received around \$1.4 million in rebates and incentives through building and energy efficiencies.” Dr. Mitchell continued, “these are choices and investments we have made because we believe in the importance of this work.”

“Most recently, our trustees approved adding a 1.37 megawatt solar array on our Main Campus that will save on energy costs, increase sustainability efforts, and encourage future academic opportunities. This is a partnership with Pivot Energy and Joliet oncologist and philanthropist Dr. Sarode Pundaleeka.”

Concluding her address, Dr. Mitchell introduced Ms. Makra who discussed the Greenest Region Compact (GRC) and its impact on Will County. Ms. Makra stated, “we are always counting, today we have 115 municipalities that have adopted the GRC with two more planning to adopt it within the coming weeks.” Following her keynote presentation, Ms. Makra facilitated a panel of local civic leaders, including Mayor Teresa Kernc of the Village of Diamond, Mayor Jim Holland of Frankfort and Randy Juras, a member of the Homer Glen Environmental Commission as they shared their community success stories as a result of adopting the GRC.

The morning continued with a workshop style session as attendees broke into small groups to dissect the GRC framework and network with their peers. Before breaking for the day, 13 communities were recognized for their formal adoption of the Greenest Region Compact in a small award ceremony.

According to Alessandra Kummelehne, Executive Director for SMHEC, “The results of this event are the essence of SMHEC's link and leverage initiative - connecting people, communities and resources to make lasting improvements to Will 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 Will County become the first County to have 100 percent of their communities adopt the Greenest Region Compact.”

The event was sponsored by ComEd, Constellation, Nania Energy, Inc, and Wight & Company.

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 thus the Will County Regional Sustainability Network was created. Through these groups, this event and many other initiatives, have been launched.

For more information about SMHEC or Link and Leverage, please contact Alessandra Kummelehne at akummelehne@prairiestate.edu.



Pictured from left to right: Lucas Rickelman (Bolingbrook), Jonathan Vanderbuilt (Park Forest), Randy Juras (Homer Glen), Mayor Jim Holland (Frankfort), Dr. Judy Mitchell (Joliet Junior College), Caryl Riley (Aurora), Mavis Bates (Aurora), Amy Wagner (Joliet), Mayor Frank Fleischer (Mokena), Mayor Teresa Kernc (Diamond), Jake Melrose (Plainfield)