

## **A Lesson from a Neighbor's Success Quincy Civic Center Suggests Fairfield's True Potential**

By Nancy Pfoutz | Staff Writer

The Civic Center in Quincy, Illinois, comparable in size and functional design to the Jefferson County Civic Center, provides an inspiring example of the economic benefit such a venue can bring to a town. Jeff Jansen, Executive Director of the Oakley Lindsay Center, spoke to Fairfield business and cultural leaders last Thursday, May 5 about the dramatic impact the Center has had on his community.

"When we took our initial survey in 1985, 68% of the city didn't think we needed this facility," Jansen said. After completion of the building in 1995 and ten years of operation, "87% give the building an A+, and opportunities seem unlimited. In ten years' time, we've grown from 560 motel beds to 1200, with \$87 million of private infusion into our central business district."

Jansen also stated, in a later meeting with merchants, that revenues from sales tax increased by 47% and property taxes decreased by 50%.

Oakley Lindsay's prior budget was \$365,000, and they recently passed a \$1.6 million budget. They're currently adding another 30,000 square feet to their facility and building another parking lot.

"We've made money for the last seven years," Jansen said. They have two years to pay off a remaining \$5 million in debt.

Jansen visited the site of the Jefferson County Center and was optimistic. "Being located in the central business district is very important," he added.

Mayor Malloy commented at the luncheon that "Fairfield has never taken on a project this big in its history. The Civic Center anchors all the goals outlined in our 10-Year Strategic Plan, including a call for 1,000 new jobs. This facility shows that we're serious about our goals, and eager to move with current trends so that young people will choose to stay in Fairfield."

Jansen urged thinking outside the box and envisioning where the city could be ten years from now. "You're right on target, your key now is cooperation," he said. "You have to do this to keep Fairfield on the map, to maintain your status. The benefits will come, just do it."

Emphasizing the urgency of making the Center profitable, Jansen spoke of the need to attract people from out of town. "You'll need to draw from a 60-80 mile area. We draw from Springfield (95 miles away), the Quad Cities, Peoria...about a 70-90 mile range."

Jansen also feels that Fairfield's greatest resource is the completion of Highway 218, "Avenue of the Saints", which will connect St. Louis, Missouri to St. Paul, Minnesota in about a year. "This will make a huge impact on Fairfield's accessibility."

Visitors fill the Oakley Lindsay Center for home shows, flower and farm shows, stallion exhibits, boat shows, concerts, a seasonal Symphony of Trees, and even mud wrestling. "Retention events are a key," Jansen advised. The Oakley Lindsay auditorium seats 500, and the event space can hold 5400 seats. "We made \$35,000 on one concert," he said. "Our theatre group operates on its own, and usually sells out."

"There will be controversies," Jansen warned. "We look back now and see how they've helped the community. You go from vision, to challenge, to setback, to miracle, to cooperation, and finally you realize your dream."