

HERMITAGE

City creates corporation, tabs board members

By Joe Pinchot
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Although the Mercer County area has been losing population and jobs for 30 years, it still has a lot going for it to attract new business, Louise Lowrey said.

There are strong highway systems, nearby airports, a low cost of living and a strong work ethic among its people, she said.

With that foundation, Ms. Lowrey and other board members of the newly formed LindenPointe Development Corp. hope to attract start-up technology businesses to the area, and give the young people who grow up here a reason to stay.

"I want to change our connotation from the Rust Belt to the Progressive Belt," said Ms. Lowrey, one of six people appointed to the corporation board Wednesday.

Hermitage commissioners adopted an ordinance Wednesday creating the corporation to

run the technology center and training building at LindenPointe technical business park on South Hermitage Road.

City officials said they hope to have the LindenPointe Development Corp.'s articles of incorporation signed in the next couple of weeks by Commissioner Duane J. Piccirilli and Hermitage Community and Economic Development Commission Chairman Rex W. Knisley, and then turn the corporation over to the board.

The corporation will develop, manage and promote the buildings. The training building opened last year, and the tech center, which will feature a testing laboratory and business incubator suites, is under construction.

Ms. Lowrey, Sharon, executive vice president and support group executive at First National Bank of Pennsylvania, Hermitage, said she is excited about the corporation's prospects.

"Is it going to be a lot of work? You betcha. Are our schedules already full? You

betcha. We have an obligation to create whatever opportunities we can," she said.

She said she is looking forward to working with the other members of the board, and praised the willingness of city officials' to appoint them.

Appointed to the board were:

■ Knisley, of Hermitage, senior vice president and regional senior leader for First National Bank, Hermitage, chairman of the Lawrence/Mercer County Workforce Investment Board, and past president of the Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce and Mercer County United Way. He will serve a three-year term.

■ Craig Columbus, New Castle, who works for Grove City College as chairman of the Entrepreneurship Department, executive director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation and fellow of the Center for Vision and Values. He will serve a one-year term.

■ Richard W. Epstein, Her-

mitage, managing partner of the law firm Ekker, Kuster, McConnell and Epstein, Sharon. He is active with groups such as Penn-Northwest Development Corp., Pennsylvania Economy League and Shenango Valley Industrial Development Authority, and is co-founder of businesses that predict the results of lawsuits, help students select colleges and careers and connects college business students to the private sector. He will serve a three-year term.

■ Haroon Inam, Hermitage, vice president of global engineering with Cattron Group International, Sharpsville, and former executive and manager with corporations involved in the aerospace, software development and engineering industries. He will serve a two-year term.

■ Crispin Anderson of Crescent, Allegheny County, controller of Lending Processing Services Inc. — the former Eastern Software Corp. — in Sharon, and board mem-

ber of Shenango Valley Industrial Development Corp. He will serve a one-year term.

Ms. Lowrey oversees the FNB Data Center in Hermitage, and is a member of the Penn State Shenango Valley Technology Advisory Board, and the board of Laurel Technical Institute, Sharon. She will serve a two-year term.

The board members will recommend additional members, up to a total of 11, with city commissioners making all appointments. Subsequent terms will be for four years.

"This is the only board we have where you don't have to be a Hermitage resident," Piccirilli said.

The decision to create a corporation to run the buildings separates the building management and program functions of the incubator, which will offer mentoring and business development advice to start-up companies.

A separate corporation also has access to more funding streams than a municipality, officials said.

"That seems to be the best practice organizational structure that we found in other regional incubators," said Assistant City Manager Gary M. Gulla.

Ms. Lowrey said she has watched the Youngstown Incubator grow and has gotten to know an official there.

"I like the fact that the folks who run the city of Hermitage realized it would take a group with diverse backgrounds and experiences to run and oversee this," she said.

"They are all excited about the opportunity, which makes us even more excited," City Manager Gary P. Hinkson said of the board members.

The board will seek 501(c)(3) non-profit status with the IRS, develop by-laws and regulations, and work out a lease of the buildings with city officials. The city will retain ownership of the buildings.