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Cornerstone Alliance: 2012 promising

By **JULIE SWIDWA** - H-P Staff Writer

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STEVENSVILLE - Cornerstone Alliance officials told investors Wednesday that 2011 was a solid year for economic development and that 2012 promises more of the same.

The emphasis will be on job creation, keeping existing businesses here and helping them to expand, and attracting new businesses to the area, Board Chairman Phil Maki said.

Officials are particularly excited about the Senior PGA Championship coming to Harbor Shores in May and the recent purchase of the former Bowater building in Benton Harbor by an auto parts maker.

Speaking at the annual investors meeting at Santaniello's Glenlord Restaurant in Lincoln Township, Cornerstone Alliance President Wendy Dant Chesser said the eyes of the world will be on the Twin Cities when the Senior PGA comes to town, and a Community Showcase Committee is hard at work preparing to help area businesses grab most of the estimated \$20 million that could be spent during the event.

"We love our regional partners, but we want to see those dollars spent here," she said.

Pat Moody, Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce vice president, said an auto parts maker has bought the 140,000-square-foot Bowater building on Paw Paw Avenue and will hire 40 people to start production in early 2012.

AluTech of Stevensville, which employs about 150 people at its plant there, has bought the long-vacant building in Benton Harbor and plans to invest \$20 million in the plant and equipment.

Accomplishments touted Wednesday for 2011 included the creation of 25 jobs as a result of 10 businesses launched by clients of Cornerstone Alliance Small Business Services, the near completion of the \$15 million HOPE VI public housing project that has created 252 houses in Benton Harbor, groundbreaking for new buildings for the Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor, expansion projects at IPC/Walsworth and Shepherd Caster Corp., construction of the first phase of the new Whirlpool campus on Main Street in Benton Harbor and continued real estate development in Harbor Shores and completion of the Golf Club at Harbor Shores clubhouse.

Whirlpool's match

Cornerstone investors, which include companies and individuals, gather yearly to hear how their dollars are at work in the Twin Cities.

Jim Marohn, chairman of investor relations for Cornerstone, said that as of the beginning of this month, \$991,680 has been received toward the \$1,050,000 goal for investor contributions for this year. Marohn said \$1,042,712 was pledged.

Every dollar up to \$1 million is matched by the Whirlpool Foundation for economic development and educational opportunities for area residents. The 2012 goal for investors is \$1,051,604.

Chesser said one of Cornerstone's goals for 2012 is to raise the awareness nationally of economic development opportunities in the Benton Harbor area. She said the organization hopes that people who visit the area for the Senior PGA will want to come back for a vacation, build a second home here or, "better yet, bring a business here."

Next year will be the last year in Cornerstone's current five-year plan, and the organization recently conducted a survey of investors, with the results being used to develop the next five-year plan.

Marohn said respondents ranked the following as the most important investments for the future: new businesses, existing businesses, Harbor Shores, physical development of the area, small business services, collaboration and work force talent recruitment.

Based on the survey results, about 72 percent said they strongly agree that Cornerstone Alliance manages investments wisely, about 24 percent are unsure and about 3 percent somewhat agree.

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