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City manager talks business

April 25, 2008 By [BOB OKON](#) bokon@scn1.com

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JOLIET -- New City Manager Thomas Thanas talked about the city policy toward business opportunities in downtown Joliet, and his own experience growing up in the family restaurant in a speech Thursday to the Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

"I know it's hard to believe that Greeks would be in the restaurant business," Thanas, whose father was a Greek immigrant, quipped as he talked about the family business.

But his experience as a bus boy and cashier at the restaurant helped him learn what's important to small-business owners, Thanas said.

"You learn that commerce really drives a lot of what we do in the community," he said.

Much of his presentation, titled "Forging a Local Business-Local Government Partnership," was aimed at telling the chamber that he and the city's elected officials appreciate the needs of business in Joliet.

Thanas is in his fourth week as city manager. He had been a city attorney for Joliet for nearly 20 years, a county judge for one year, and most recently was a corporate attorney for Harrah's Entertainment.

He said the city would continue to pursue new business development, such as the proposed Bridge Street Town Centre lifestyle center.

Thanas said he was "cautiously optimistic" about the 314-acre Bridge Street project, adding, "We're only as good as the economy on that one."

The project has the potential to radically alter the city's retail environment, creating 1.3 million square feet of retail, restaurant and office space near the interchange of Interstates 55 and 80.

Thanas said the city council is likely to vote May 6 on a development agreement that would pay for a new interchange to enhance access to the Bridge Street project.

Thanas said elected officials also are committed to retaining existing businesses in Joliet while seeking out new development.

He said he would be visiting local companies and coming to their events to talk about a "partnership" between city hall and local business.

He also said the downtown business district remains a priority for the city.

"One important key to our success is downtown Joliet," he said.

He invited business owners to look at opportunities to locate downtown.

Thanas also commended his predecessor, John Mezera, and city leaders for turning around the Joliet business environment from its dire days in the early 1980s.

"When I started working with the city in 1981," he said, "we were writing more demolition permits than building permits in Joliet."

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