



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **IEDC Secures \$1M to Advance Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Education and Workforce Development in Itasca County**

**Grand Rapids, MN:** Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) is excited to unveil plans to create a space for entrepreneurial innovation. With over \$1 million secured in grant funding, IEDC is renovating a 16,500 square foot facility at 1201 SE 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Grand Rapids. When complete, the space will be a place for aspiring and experienced entrepreneurs, students, educators, and anyone looking to learn new skills to advance a career in the industrial sector.

“This project has been so long in the making, and we are absolutely thrilled to be moving forward so powerfully,” explained Tamara Lowney, IEDC President. “We were recently awarded a \$750K RISE grant from the USDA, which will allow us to acquire equipment, complete renovations, and create an inspiring place for people to explore and iterate big ideas.”

#### **Introducing: The Forge**

The new space, dubbed “The Forge,” will be a place where ideas take shape. The facility will be outfitted with tools, equipment and machinery available for entrepreneurs to use during prototyping. Industry experts will be available for consultation and advice. Business consultants will be available for strategic advice, business planning and financial guidance. Students can come to learn about different industries and opportunities available in the region. Existing members of the workforce can hone new skills to advance their careers in any direction. The possibilities are endless, with much more on the horizon.

“We are excited to see this opportunity at The Forge come to fruition,” explained Jessalyn Sabin, interim Dean of Academics at Hibbing Community College. “When students see what’s out there, they realize that the region holds more opportunity than they ever thought possible. The Forge will provide extremely valuable experiences to local students.”

The facility will include individual and collaborative areas, a high-tech classroom, a community break area, a community equipment area, a student-only area, and private innovator-only areas to be leased to entrepreneurs to develop and test prototypes.

“The Forge will be an inclusive and ever-evolving concept,” said Randy Back, operations director at Jobs Empowerment and Training, a CareerForce partner. “Every day will look a little different because Itasca County’s needs are in flux. We envision a space that inspires exploration, education and collaboration to create new businesses and opportunities for career advancement throughout the region.”

### **Tour the Forge on October 15, 2021, at 11:00 am**

Join IEDC and partners in celebrating the Forge, where ideas take shape. It’s an innovative concept in a space designed to advance entrepreneurship, innovation, education, and workforce development.

**Date:** Friday, October 15, 2021

**Time:** 11:00 am

**Address:** 1201 SE 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue - Grand Rapids

Walk through the space, hear remarks from Tamara Lowney, IEDC President; Congressman Pete Stauber; Andrew Gag, USDA Business and Cooperative Programs Director Rural Development; and more.

The unveiling event is free and open to the public, the local business community, media representatives, elected officials, and anyone interested in exploring what the future of entrepreneurship looks like in Itasca County.

### **Partners Bring the Forge from Concept to Reality**

Funding for The Forge comes largely from a \$750K [USDA Rural Innovation Stronger Economy \(RISE\) grant](#) recently awarded to IEDC. The highly competitive RISE grant program offers grant assistance to create and augment high-wage jobs, accelerate the formation of new businesses, support industry clusters and maximize the use of local productive assets in eligible low-income rural areas. IEDC was one of just 10 grant recipients this year.

“Creating an innovative, growth-focused center for the advancement of both entrepreneurship and workforce development is exactly the type of project the RISE program was created to support,” said Andrew Gag, USDA Business and Cooperative Programs Director Rural Development.

Additional funding sources include a \$130K grant awarded to Itasca Community College from the Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, \$150K from Itasca County ARP Funds, \$50K from Arrowhead Intelligent Region, and generous equipment donations from e2ip Technologies.

This project brings together excellent partners for the benefit of all Itasca County and the surrounding area. The Forge is a collaborative project that would not be possible without the hard work and efforts of many partners. IEDC would like to recognize and thank the Northeast

Office of Job Training, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Itasca Community College/Minnesota North Colleges for support in planning, securing funding and dreaming big for Itasca County.

“We can’t thank our partners and funders enough for believing in this concept and helping us bring it to life for Itasca County,” said Lowney. “This region is bursting with innovative thinkers, and the Forge will be a place for them to build new futures.”

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### **About Itasca Economic Development Corporation**

Established in 1981 as a non-profit organization, Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) is dedicated to providing charitable education and research efforts that support and advance the creation and retention of quality jobs by working with the business community and entrepreneurs residing in and around Itasca County. IEDC houses an advisor from the Small Business Development Center, Entrepreneur Fund and APEX and is the Itasca area resource for business development, retention and attraction. Visit the IEDC website at [www.itascadv.org](http://www.itascadv.org) or call 218-326-9411 for more information.