

# BUILDING ON DREAMS

THE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES 65 YEARS OF SUCCESS

**T**he Development Association is celebrating its 65th year, helmed by the steadfast leadership of Jim Caesar, the D.A.'s longest-tenured Executive Director. As a nonprofit organization, the Development Association's accomplishments are many, as are its failures.

Its role is to develop, encourage, expand and support business development in Superior and Douglas County, and it's easy to see why the Development Association has been so successful.

It reaches this milestone as an incredibly well-run and respected organization.

They have stayed true to their mission and goals and are a vital part of Superior's economic development engine. Caesar doesn't spend much time looking back. He's focused on the future, pursuing a long-time dream while facing the coming impacts of the Blatnik Bridge closure.

What he wonders is, why doesn't everybody know who we are?

"If you look at the amount of new businesses that we've actually had in the buildings, the housing units that have been built, the restaurants, I think you'll see that Superior is a rising community, and we have some amazing businesses that are

working here and are trying to come here," says Douglas County Board Chair Mark Liebaert. "If half of the businesses that are on course right now to show up here from out of state show up, you will be amazed."

Driven by lower taxes, short commutes, a solid infrastructure and – something for the locals to cheer – a better sales tax than neighboring Duluth. Superior is seeing an upswing in business development.

"Some of the regulations that businesses are facing in Minnesota are putting them at a disadvantage. I think they recognize that Superior is promoting them instead of coming up with things that make it harder to do





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business," Liebaert said. "Douglas County and the City of Superior seem to be trying to make it easier for businesses to come here, and I think businesses are recognizing that."

They've been following the same mantra since they opened their doors at the end of 1960 when business leaders in the Twin Ports were bursting with optimism. Nationally, the mid-1950s saw the end of the Korean War, and the expansion of an interstate highway system. Locally, the coming of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the refinery and the planned Duluth-Superior High Bridge created optimism. To that end, the idea of an organization dedicated to bringing in and assisting existing business was floated to capitalize on this resurgence.

Alan Jaques, President of the Development Association and Vice-Chair of the Douglas County Board of Supervisors, reflected on the start of the organization in 1960.

"I think where the Development Association came about, if I remember my dad telling me correctly, is back in the '60s, Superior had seen a sharp decline after World War Two and the Korean War; all those ships were made, a lot of that stuff, the factories were shutting down. The oil refinery was just starting to get going, so there was a need to try to drive more business this way," said Jaques. "That's how a bunch of guys got together and did a gentleman's agreement to throw some money into a kitty and hire an executive director to hopefully ad-

vocate for them at the city and at the state level to try to bring other businesses to the community. I think it's worked. We've had some years that we weren't able to drive anything this way, but I think in the years past, we've had some good successes."

In the first month of its existence, Mayor Lawrence M. Hagen praised the organization for its dedicated work. "From this basic essential, the citizens of this area can with confidence support the Superior-Douglas County Development Association in the resurgence toward economic development. Within the framework of this endeavor, the very rare and vital quality – innovation – will be constantly needed. We must learn more about how to discover and develop it."



**"WE THINK IT WORKS WELL, AND THAT MODEL HAS BEEN WORKING WELL FOR 65 YEARS FOR US. IT'S THE DEDICATION. IT'S THE PARTNERSHIP; IT'S NOT JUST THE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION DOING BUSINESS BY THEMSELVES."**

– ALAN JAQUES, PRESIDENT - THE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The mission of the Development Association and their goals have changed little from day one. From the Articles of Incorporation, signed by city attorney Toby Marcovich and John Chisolm on Dec. 20, 1960:

*Article 3. The purposes shall be exclusively for the civic betterment and development of the City of Superior and Douglas County; for the development of natural resources within the County; the fostering and expansion of existing industries and commercial enterprises; and in cooperation with state and federal agencies, the continuing expansion of resort and recreational possibilities of the county; the establishment of a civic and economic climate that will encourage and attract new industries; and to do all things necessary to participate actively and aggressively in all matters pertaining to the social, economic and industrial welfare of the City of Superior and Douglas County.*

Pursuing its agenda, the groundwork for success was laid early on to bring large business to Superior. They also met with some setbacks. An early emphasis of the SDCDA was the purchase of a large tract of land for the creation of an industrial district.

**“DOUGLAS COUNTY AND THE CITY OF SUPERIOR SEEM TO BE TRYING TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR BUSINESSES TO COME HERE, AND I THINK BUSINESSES ARE RECOGNIZING THAT.”**

– MARK LIEBAERT, BOARD CHAIR - DOUGLAS COUNTY



More than 125 members attended the DA's 65th Annual meeting, including, from left, Rob Sandstrom, SWL&P, Anne Porter, LHB, and Jeremy Egnash, National Bank of Commerce.

Plans were revealed for the district on Tower Avenue, opposite municipal airport reserve area, north of Tri-State Fair Grounds parking lot on west side of Tower Avenue.

The plans eventually fell through because the property is not connected to the city sewer and water system and remains one of the largest undeveloped tracts of land within the City of Superior.

By the mid-60s the efforts of the Development Association to lure larger industry to Superior and develop Connor's Point

were drawing the attention of companies like Superior Steel Supply and Superior Fiber Products, Inc. The D.A. was also leaning into a pivotal role by facilitating the administration of federal Economic Development Administration monies.

**GUIDING GROWTH: STRENGTHENING OUR REGION**

Most organizations have a hall of fame of sorts, a display of their successes. You'd see a lot of familiar names on a list for the Development Association, but that doesn't tell the whole story. There are probably many more failures than successes in the past 65 years, and that's okay.

"The biggest failure we had was the Kestrel project," recalled Mark Liebaert, "... when the city lost \$2 million and the county



## BRIDGE TO BRIDGE: DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION TIMELINE 1959 - 2026

1959 - 1960 ..... Duluth-Superior High Bridge constructed  
 April 1959: Superior's first Seaway salty, The Herald arrives at Globe Elevator.  
 Superior-Douglas County Development Association, Inc.: Articles of Incorporation  
 December 20, 1960, 1323 Broadway Avenue, Superior.  
 July 1961: First Headquarters: Parlors D and E, Androy Hotel, Superior.  
 Called the "Tower House."  
 December 2, 1961: Duluth-Superior High Bridge opens.

1961 - 1963 ..... Eugene Kraut ..... Executive Director  
 1961 - 1966 ..... George E. Jarvis ..... President  
 ..... Ray Polzin ..... Acting Director for a couple months  
 1964 - 1965 ..... Vernon Sell ..... Executive Director  
 ..... George E. Jarvis ..... President

July 1965: New Headquarters: The Boston Block: 1302 Tower, Suite 202

1965 - 1969 ..... Robert Wilcox ..... Executive Director

1966 November: original board members cited for their service by Mayor Charles Deneweth: Howard Underhill, George E. Jarvis, Paul H. Akers, Lawrence E. Sinclair, and L. A. Nichols.

1967 ..... Charles Deneweth ..... President  
 1968 ..... William Stack ..... President

1968: SDCDA certified to receive to receive federal and state economic assistance

October 1968: George Emmanuel Jarvis...president of SDCDA 1960 - 1963 dies  
 1969 ..... Bernard Fredrickson ..... President

1970 - 1971 ..... Joseph Stuart ..... Executive Director  
 1970 ..... Orval Anderson ..... President

1970: SDCDA celebrates 10th anniversary

1971 ..... Robert Paulson ..... President

January, 1971: Secretary Mrs. Gail O'Keefe awarded Secretary of the Year

1972 - 1974 ..... Raymond Russell ..... Executive Director  
 1972 ..... Joseph Till ..... President  
 1973 ..... Lowell Banks ..... President  
 1974 - 1980 ..... Ken Strauman ..... President

1974 (5 mo.) ..... Tom Hart ..... Executive Director

Acting Director - ..... Gail O'Keefe

1976 - 1978 ..... Paul Hanson ..... Executive Director

March, 1978: awarded the first shell building under a new program designed to attract industry and jobs to Northern Wisconsin

1979 - 1980 ..... Rick Trasher ..... Executive Director  
 1980 ..... Harris Mahan ..... President

1980: 18,000 sq. ft. "spec building" available for manufacturing and distribution.  
 Superior-Douglas County Industrial Park

1980: SDCDA celebrates 20th anniversary

1980 - 1988 ..... Michael McNamara ..... Executive Director  
 (August)  
 1980 ..... Harris Mahan ..... President  
 1981 ..... Carl Hanson ..... President  
 1982 ..... Rick Crawford ..... President  
 1983 ..... Jim Sigfrids ..... President

1983: Linda O'Keefe, Secretary, retires after 22 years. Longest serving employee.

1984 ..... Marjorie Kinney ..... President

October 25, 1984: Richard I. Bong Memorial Bridge opens

1985: Downtown area is designated as a National Historic District.

1985 - 1986 ..... Peter Almstedt ..... President

March 4-6, 1986: First Superior Days, Madison, Wisconsin

1987 ..... Rick Rockwood ..... President  
 1988 ..... Eugene McGillis ..... President  
 1988 (Aug-Dec) ..... Douglas Finn ..... Interim Director  
 1989 (Jan-Oct) ..... Fred Brueggeman ..... Executive Director  
 1989 - 1990 ..... Eugene McGillis ..... President

1989: Business Incubation Center opens, 4th Floor, Hawkes Hall, UW-Superior

1990 - 1996 (Jul) ..... Douglas Finn ..... Executive Director  
 1990 ..... Tim Sauter ..... President

1990: S-DCDA celebrates 30th anniversary

1991 ..... Robert Paulson ..... President  
 1992 ..... Hugh Lawson ..... President  
 1993 ..... Dick Porter ..... President  
 1994 ..... Jann Brill ..... President

1995: Mission Statement Revised  
 March 1995: S-DCDA purchase Common Health Food warehouse.  
 Superior November 1995: Business Center opens at 1423 N. Eighth Street

1995 ..... James Brew ..... President  
 1996 - 1990 ..... Kenneth Stubbe ..... Executive Director  
 (May - June 99)

July 1, 1996: Nonprofit corporation SBC, Inc. formed. SBC, Inc. absorbs the former Business Incubation Center.

1996 - 1998 ..... Frank Dumonsau, Jr. .... President  
 1998 - 2000 ..... Joseph J. Till, III ..... President  
 1999 ..... Michelle M. Mc Kercher ..... Interim Director  
 (June - Jan 2000)

December 1999: S-DCDA Celebrates 40 Years  
 December 1999: S-DCDA becomes The Development Association, Inc., is formed

May 2000: Superior Business Center merges with Superior-Douglas County Development Association

2000: The Development Association celebrates 40th anniversary

2000 - 2001 ..... Roger Engle ..... President  
 2000 - June 01 ..... Kenneth Stubbe ..... Executive Director  
 2001 - 2002 ..... Frank Giesen ..... President  
 2001 (June - Sep) ..... Frank Giesen ..... Interim Director  
 2001 (Sep 2009) ..... Andy Lisak ..... Executive Director  
 2002 - 2005 ..... Jim Zastrow ..... President

September 2004: Superior hosts Wisconsin Economic Development Association (WEDA) fall conference

January 2005: DVD created to promote economic development in Superior and Douglas County received an award for excellence from the Mid-American Economic Development Council (MAEDC).

2005 - 2007 ..... Fred Shusterich ..... President  
 2007 - 2009 ..... Michael Murray ..... President  
 2009 - 2011 ..... Bill Stack ..... President

2010: The Development Association celebrates 50th anniversary

2011 ..... Jim Caesar ..... Interim Executive Director  
 2011 - 2013 ..... Meg Thoreson ..... President  
 2013 ..... Michelle Hostetter ..... Executive Director  
 2013 - 2015 ..... Mike McCoshen ..... President  
 2013 - ..... Jim Caesar ..... Executive Director  
 2015 - 2017 ..... Bill Fennessey ..... President  
 2017 - 2019 ..... Brian Milliken ..... President  
 2019 - 2021 ..... Charlie Glazman ..... President

2020: The Development Association celebrates 60th anniversary

2021 - 2022 ..... Tom Fennessey ..... President  
 2022 - 2024 ..... Paul Holt ..... President  
 2024 - ..... Alan Jaques ..... President

**2026: The Development Association 65th anniversary**

lost \$500,000, but the chance to have 1,000 high-paying jobs in the City of Superior and Douglas County was too good not to try to obtain. So we invested in that. Hands down, the biggest success is the partnership in the Superior Business Center building on Hammond and Eighth Street."

The Superior Business Center (SBC) has been successful since it first opened in November 1995. "I don't know where the idea came from, but we wanted an incubation center," recalled Joe Till, former Board President (1972, 1998-2000) who was involved in the creation of the incubator. "I don't know if any of these things were original ideas. Probably incubation centers were started in different cities or different localities, and we decided that one way to help start-up businesses was to have a center where they could begin their operations at reasonable, very reasonable, rent and whatever benefits we could offer, including counseling of some kind."



**"WE FACILITATED A LITTLE BUSINESS CALLED GENESIS EQUIPMENT THAT LOCATED THERE WHILE THEY WERE BUILDING THEIR FACILITY OUT ON CONNOR'S POINT. WE HAD A NUMBER OF OTHER BUSINESSES SINCE THEN HAVE GRADUATED OUT OF THE FACILITY."**

– CHARLIE GLAZMAN, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - SUPERIOR BUSINESS CENTER



Charlie Glazman had just arrived in Superior in 1998 when he took the position as Executive Director of the SBC, led at the time by Heidi Timm-Bijold. Glazman served in that position for approximately three years until a shift in direction brought the SBC under the direct management of the Development Association.

"It was decided that the Development Association was more aligned to facilitate management of the building as they were intimately involved with the starting of new businesses," said Glazman.

Regardless of who was running it, the Superior Business Center remains one of the cornerstones of the Development Association business model.

Glazman seemed genuinely surprised when he recalled some of the early businesses at the SBC. "Gosh, you know, we graduated Northern Waters Smokehaus out of the Superior Business Center. We facilitated a little business called Genesis Equipment that located there while they were building their facility out on Connor's Point. We had a number of other businesses since then have graduated out of the facility."

From left, Jenice Meyer, DA; Jason Serck, City of Superior; Al Johnson and Andrew Archer of BotCrew, and Jim Caesar, DA.

## A SUPERIOR REVIVAL

The Development Association follows a four-step plan on how they support growth for Superior and its members. They do this by focusing on business creation, business recruitment, expansion and retention, regional leadership and fiscal sustainability.

To that end, today's mission is rooted in the founding spirit of the Development Association:

*The Development Association champions business growth, creation, recruitment and retention, in the City of Superior and Douglas County, Wisconsin. Through the support of its members, it encourages entrepreneurship and assists business start-ups, while identifying the needs, threats and opportunities facing existing businesses.*

Development Association member benefits include one-on-one guidance from industry specialists, connections to more than 150 local businesses and partnerships with government and industry leaders, and access to programs like the DC Revolving and DA Loan Funds.

The Development Association operates three Business Development Centers, "providing the space, support and community early-stage businesses need to grow and become self-sustaining. The most recent acquisition is the historic U.S. Post Office and Federal Courthouse building at 1401 Tower Ave. The other development centers are on Hughitt Avenue and on Eighth Street.

Keep an eye out for some upcoming rebranding; the Development Association's Superior Business Center locations will soon be called The Developmental Centers.

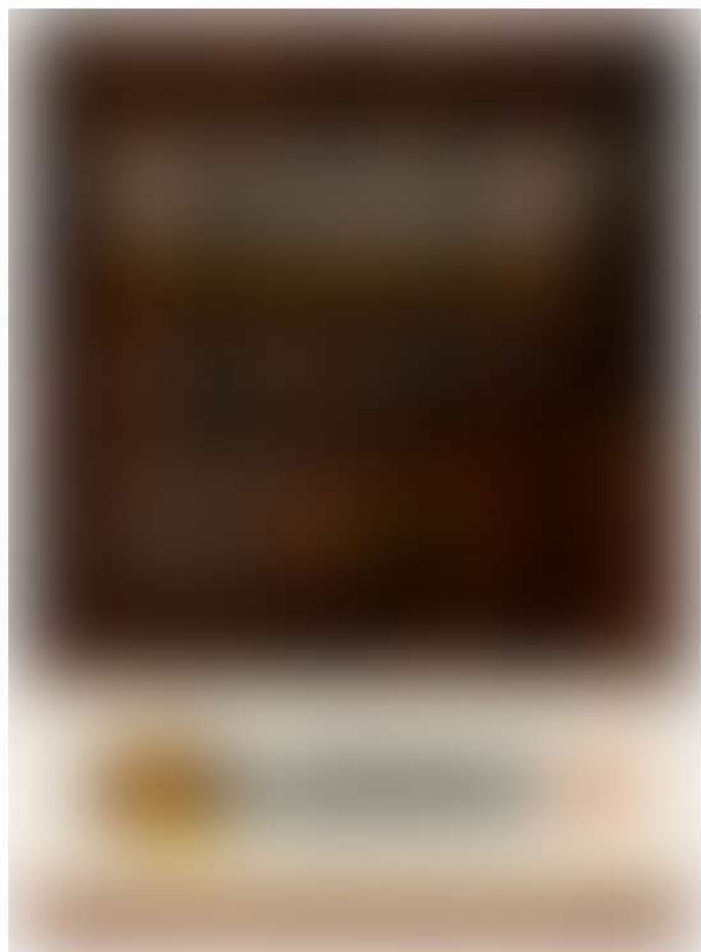
Among the recent Development Association accomplishments are: Uffda Kombucha's move to a new building, Fox & Fireflies Book's expansion at the Development Center, Love Creamery opening their flagship scoop shop in Billings Park, and an economic impact study conducted about the replacement of the Blatnik Bridge.

Throughout its 65 years, the Development Association has partnered in one way or another with nearly every civic and governmental entity in the city. A bright spot in the relationship between the D. A. and Douglas County is the management of the Douglas County Revolving Loan Fund, continuing a long-standing tradition of cooperation between the D.A. and Douglas County.

"We have a loan program where the Development Association brings loan applicants to us. Douglas County has money invested in there," said County Board Chair Liebaert. "We work hand in hand with the Development Association. The Development Association takes the applicants, helps promote them, as they're doing their business promotion. It's one of the tools they use to help them be successful."

## UPDATING A STRONG TRADITION

In 1999, the Board of Directors agreed upon a change in the name of the organization. Out was the lengthy Superior-Douglas County Development Association, replaced with the abbreviated Development Association, Inc. Administrative Assistant Michelle Johnsen made the milestone announcement, stating, "Just because an organization, such as ours, takes on a new face every 3-5 years, does not suggest that we have





changed our general focus, which is to retain, expand and create new business and industry. We continue to strive to meet the needs of the community.”

Few organizations, fewer nonprofits, make it as long as we have, reflected Glazman on his years with the D.A. “I’m very proud of the fact that we’ve been able to transition through a number of different economies. We’ve gone through recessions, we’ve gone through the internet bubbles, all these different things, and the D.A. still is a very vibrant, important and I think essential organization in the economic development of the city and the county. It’s been the lead agency for the past 65 years, and hopefully it will continue for the next 65 because they’re doing it.”

Board president Jaques agrees, 65 years is a milestone to celebrate.

“Sixty-five years running strong is good. It tells us that we’re doing something right, and that the community wants us,” reflects Jaques. “We go out actively looking for more membership, and we get it. People are willing to pay the membership dues because they see the returns that they get in it. It’s hard to quantify, but when you start seeing more businesses show up and they want to be in this community, we think it works well, and that model has been working well for 65 years for us. It’s the dedication. It’s the partnership; it’s not just the Development Association doing business by themselves.”

As for Jim Caesar's dream? He wants to build a mid-sized visitor's convention center and event space campus somewhere in Superior. He has a few places in mind and has held the belief for years that they would draw well from downstate for business, as well as for many of the local industries who could have a space for holiday parties, trade shows and community events.

Have dreams of your own? The Development Association is ready to help. 📧

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.



BotCrew CEO Andrew Archer and President AJ Johnson provided a keynote presentation at the DA's Annual Meeting on May 8, 2026.



Jim Caesar and Tim Sauter