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## Without Pause

DPP's work in business, innovation and talent development hasn't slowed despite COVID-19 pandemic **BY MICHELE A. SCHIAVONI**

DELAWARE PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP – Delaware's lead economic development resource – is completing its third year in operation. President and CEO Kurt Foreman leads the DPP team in working with site selectors, commercial developers and business executives on where to locate or grow a business and in supporting innovation and talent development statewide.

DPP has worked without interruption throughout 2020. Foreman answered the following questions to share how the team has responded to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and continued moving forward into 2021.

### **What was an unusual way you had to adapt this year?**

Taking DPP's 2020 Delaware Summit – a familiarization tour that brings site selectors specializing in Delaware's core industry sectors to experience Delaware and meet with the DPP team and our statewide economic development partners – virtual. We originally planned the event to take place on-site throughout Sussex County.

To add fun and Delaware flavor to the virtual experience, we included evening cook-alongs featuring Southern Delaware food and drink. We partnered with Chef Doug Ruley and Chef Maurice Catlett of SoDel Concepts, Sam Calagione of Dogfish Head, and Katie Evans of The Frozen Farmer to



*Kurt Foreman  
President and CEO,  
Delaware Prosperity  
Partnership*

showcase Delaware’s culinary coast.

Everyone involved loved the event, and it really furthered our efforts to raise Delaware’s profile with key business-attraction personnel. One site selector was highly impressed that Governor John Carney took the time to talk with participants since other governors usually only address site selectors. Another said it was the most creative Zoom event he had attended all year.

### How has DPP helped Delaware businesses during COVID-19?

Supporting existing Delaware businesses is a key part of our mission, and the pandemic provided us with the chance to help their pandemic concerns and needs be heard. During the spring, we partnered with the Division of Small Business, to host virtual town halls for more than 700 Delaware business owners and operators. We also launched a quantitative survey to monitor the impact of the pandemic on Delaware businesses. We were one of the first states to do this kind of field survey, and we shared the results with both the survey participants and a group gathering such data nationally.

### What role is DPP playing in advancing equity in Delaware?

Using a JPMorgan Chase Foundation grant, DPP embarked on a two-part strategy toward a more diverse tech talent pipeline in Delaware. This included conducting 20 one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and virtual opportunity workshops. The resulting plan builds on successful community-based working models already helping to feed Delaware’s tech talent pipeline, such as Zip Code Wilmington and Code Differently, and recommends expanding public policies to accelerate training innovations and support private sector talent development.

### Supporting innovation is another key part of DPP’s mission. What was the team’s innovation focus in 2020?

A study we conducted previously with Facility Logix indicated the need to increase Delaware’s capacity of “ready-to-go” lab space. During 2020, we’ve been working to ensure that bioscience startups have the capacity to not only launch but also to thrive and grow here.

In October, we helped convene a virtual roundtable with the Delaware Bioscience Association, the Delaware Sustainable Chemistry Alliance, the Commercial-Industrial Realty Council, and The Committee of 100. More than 100 representatives of economic development organizations, builders, real estate developers, incubators, entrepreneurial resource organizations, startups, and established companies attended. DPP also submitted a proposal to the Council on Development Finance for a grant program to help early-stage and small-to-medium-size companies offset lab space fit-out costs and give landlord developers a “lease guarantee” to mitigate potential losses from leasing to early-stage science companies.

### How has the year been from a job-growth perspective?

We’ve been very busy and working on several promising investment opportunities to bring even more jobs to the state. For example, U.S. Corrugated is finalizing plans for a “super plant” that would bring 159 new jobs to Central Delaware. U.S. Corrugated initially considered only Northern Delaware locations, but in cooperation with our county, local and state partners, in this case Kent County and City of Dover, we showed company officials all that Central Delaware had to offer and secured the deal.

Earlier in 2020, Amazon decided to build its newest advanced fulfillment center – its third location in Delaware – at the old Boxwood site south of Wilmington. We couldn’t be more pleased to see a vacant industrial site turning into a location for at least 1,000 new Delaware jobs.

And there’s even more opportunity in the pipeline for 2021. ■



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