


## Extension Leads Regional Planning Effort

Community members sought Extension's assistance to lead the effort to develop a regional economic development plan. A regional plan would formalize economic development goals among the communities and open up access to grant dollars through the federal government's Economic Development Administration (EDA). The Extension team led by Jennifer Russell, community and economic development educator and supported by both Zach Kennedy, Community and Economic Development Specialist and Will Andresen, Graduate Assistant, Department of Urban and Regional Planning spent nearly seven months gathering data, facilitating community meetings and writing the plan. By June 2020 the draft plan titled *Western Illinois River Valley Economic Development Strategy* was approved by EDA and by November 2020 all six communities (Calhoun, Jersey, Greene, Macoupin, Montgomery and Christian counties) approved the final document.

## Extension provides virtual customer service training for Jacksonville Chamber

Eleven business leaders attended a virtual customer service training which discussed the needs of customers impacted by the pandemic, new ways to reach out and best practices to support staff during this time. Another 31 participants viewed the broadcast taped earlier in the month during a webinar for the Champaign Public Library *Grow Your Business Series*.

The Chamber's Business Division invites you to attend:



Thursday, November 12, 2020  
12:00 to 1:00 p.m.  
Live Webinar (RSVP required)  
Presented by Jennifer Russell  
University of Illinois Extension

Learn new strategies to entice new clients and customers, reach your regulars and engage your staff.

How do you reach your clients and customers during a pandemic?

As many customers continue to order online and limit trips into their favorite retail stores and restaurants, business owners know that every interaction, phone call, or online order is extremely important. Spend time during this webinar discussing how business owners can reach out to customers in new ways, build resilience with their staff members and share best practices from the field.

## Collaboration Grant for Tourism Awarded

Rural communities in Illinois face an increasing demand by tourists for outdoor recreation activities. This growth in demand presents an opportunity for rural communities to reimagine rural tourism. Jennifer Russell along with Professors Zou and Soulard in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism were recently awarded a 2-year research grant totaling \$59,590 for their proposal, I-Rural: Reimagining Illinois Rural Tourism through Community and Extension Collaboration. Grafton, Galena, Savanna and Havana were selected as pilot sites for the study which will run from 2021-2023. If you have interest in this project, please reach out to Jennifer Russell via email at [perica@illinois.edu](mailto:perica@illinois.edu)