

## **Borich brings experience as new economic development director**

**By Lydia Statz, Union staff writer | Posted: Thursday, March 13, 2014 10:08 am**

JEFFERSON — The past few months have been a whirlwind for Genevieve Borich. Since being hired as the new executive director of the Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium, she has moved to Fort Atkinson from Chicago; bought a house, car and several appliances; handed off the company she founded and begun work in her new post this week.

Borich, who has a doctorate in urban and regional planning from the University of Illinois, previously worked as the executive director of the Rockford Region Economic Development District. In 2011, she founded SnapSense, a company that helps communities measure and track data to be more effective.

Although she is an Iowa native, Borich said she was eager to make the move to Wisconsin when she saw the position vacated when Dennis Heling moved to a similar post in Shawano County after 10 years in Jefferson.

“I was pretty familiar with Wisconsin. We used to have a family cabin in northeast Iowa, so I have driven through Wisconsin and explored it quite a bit,” she said. “I really love the Midwest and particularly was very interested in Wisconsin, and economic development is kind of my core background along with sustainability. I saw the job announcement and thought I’d give it a whirl.”

She said she hopes to bring some of her background in sustainability to local projects, emphasizing that projects that are economically and environmentally sustainable don’t have to be at odds with the county’s economic plans.

“There definitely are elements of sustainability and community development within economic development ... It’s all about economic development at the end of the day,” she said. “Folks talk about and view things in different ways and have different perspectives, but they all understand money and what it costs, and efficiencies and things like that. In a lot of ways, sustainability is about that.”

Borich’s firm, SnapSense, was built on her belief that communities should harness the vast amounts of data available to them to make smart decisions about their future growth. She built her doctorate dissertation on that premise, and later worked with the Rockford area on a three-year initiative to analyze current trends in the area.

“Growing up, I found it extremely interesting that companies could market to you before you even knew you wanted a product, through your credit card receipts, your ZIP code, all that kind of stuff.

So I feel like communities ... need to have that kind of information, too, to make smart decisions,” she said.

Borich said she hopes to bring her expertise in that field to Jefferson County.

“Figuring out what kind of data we can harness here, I think, is a real opportunity. I’m already hearing about how some data is being used, and figure out how to capitalize on that to use it in marketing materials and getting it out there to folks is an area we can work on,” Borich said.

Her fiance, Darren Coady, who previously served as the firm’s managing director of operations, will guide the company in her stead.

This won’t be Borich’s first time leading a regional development group, and she’s counting on her experience pulling together the expertise of many parties to help her in the task.

The JCEDC consists of 10 voting members, including representatives from each city or village and three county board supervisors. The executive director serves to provide professional guidance to the organization’s policies, create/promote partnerships throughout the region and administer grant and loan programs to promote new and expanding businesses.

“I was the executive director of the Rockford Regional Development District, and so working at a regional level with multiple communities and constituents is something that I really got a lot of good experience with through that position. I’m hoping to bring that to the table,” she said.

“But also my work in sustainability and understanding how economic development is important for small towns, mid-sized towns within a region. I’m very excited to bring what I’ve learned from other communities and see how those lessons learned can help Jefferson County.”

After moving into her new home on Friday and beginning her duties on Monday, Borich hasn’t had much time to take stock of what’s on the county’s plate between introductions.

“I’m just doing a lot of listening and observing right now. I think there are a lot of good opportunities to work on workforce development, targeting industries on growing those clusters that we already have in the area, and, of course, entrepreneurship and small businesses are going to be a focus, too,” she said. “It’s been really nice, and everyone I’ve met has been really nice and supportive. It’s been really enjoyable.”

When she’s not behind her desk or in the community drumming up support for a new project, Borich likes to spend her time behind the stove whipping up a good meal, on the yoga mat or utilizing her artistic training in painting, drawing and photography. She also is anxious about one other great opportunity that the move from Chicago will bring her.

“I’m really excited about all the canoeing in the area,” she said.