

# From Otsego to Oakland: Auction leads to business trip, economic advice

- Mark Cavitt The Oakland Press

May 3, 2017



Mark Cavitt/The Oakland Press(L-r:) Oakland County Commissioner Hugh Crawford, Otsego County Executive Director of Economic Alliance Lisa McComb, Otsego County Board of Commissioners Chairman Ken Borton, Oakland County Commissioner Shelley Taub, Otsego County Finance Director Rachel Frisch, Otsego County Human Resources Director Trisha Adams and Oakland County Commissioner Tom Middleton.

OAKLAND COUNTY — It was a business trip of sorts, one to develop a relationship with and see firsthand what Oakland County is doing to drive its economy above many others statewide and around the country.

This all started about a year ago when a lunch with County Executive L. Brooks Patterson was auctioned off by Oakland County Commissioner Shelley Taub at the Michigan Association of Counties' annual fundraising auction.

The winner of that Auction? Otsego County Board of Commissioners Chairman Ken Borton.

"People usually bring fruit baskets or baskets of goodies made in their county, I brought Brooks (Patterson)," said Taub. "I took Ken and his wife to lunch here in Oakland County and then we met Brooks (Patterson), He started talking about his economic development plans and God bless him for that."

Borton said he lived in northern Oakland County for many years and wanted the chance to meet Patterson.

"He is like my superstar kind of guy," said Borton. "I expected maybe five minutes with him but he gave us almost an hour. I was really curious about Oakland County Automation Alley. Our area is completely reliant on tourism, we have no industry to speak of and very little living wage jobs."

Taub currently serves as board president of the Michigan Association of Counties while Borton serves as second vice-chair of the association.

Taub said Borton was impressed with Patterson's pride in his county's economy and thought to himself, "we need that in Otsego County."

"I spoke with (Oakland County Director of Economic Development and Community Affairs) Irene Spanos and began talking about how we could get them down here to

visit,” said Taub. “We have so much to offer here in Oakland County and we are willing to share our knowledge with other counties.”

These events all led up to a two-day visit last week, which included Borton, Otsego County Finance Director Rachel Frisch, Human Resources Director Trisa Adams and Otsego County Economic Alliance Executive Director Lisa McComb.

“We want to try and bring some industry into our area,” said Borton. “I’m, on a much smaller scale, going to try and bring automation alley back up north to get away to being completely dependent on tourism dollars.”

By comparison, the two counties are much different. Otsego leans primarily on tourism as it’s number one source of revenue each year while Oakland County leans on automotive industries.

Otsego County has a Fiscal Year 2017 budget of \$35.9 million compared to Oakland County’s \$854.33 million budget for Fiscal Year 2017.

On Wednesday, Taub gave the four visitors a tour of Oakland County, which included stops in Ferndale and Birmingham before attending the Oakland County Board of Commissioners meeting later that day.

“I took them to two towns including the absolute pinnacle of perfection, according to all the planners in the state, The City of Birmingham,” said Taub. “I also took them to Ferndale. A place that was kind of dumpy years ago but is now a vibrant and exciting place. We wanted to get them looking at things in a different way.”

Borton said he didn’t even recognize Ferndale from his time living in Oakland County.

“I was very, very impressed,” said Borton. “It was a really good day. The biggest thing I’ll take away from this visit is Oakland County has gone through some really severe

downtimes and has bounced back. You have to remain positive and continue to work and put good people around you.

Their final day in Oakland County, April 27, included a morning stop at the Oakland County Executive Office Building in Waterford for a meeting with Oakland County Director of Facilities Management Art Holdsworth and later Spanos, before heading off to the county's annual Economic Outlook Luncheon in Troy.

Spanos said this was the first time she has hosted officials from another county in Michigan. She hopes they took away some new ideas that they can use to help their community.

"I have hosted government officials from France, India, Korea and other countries who want to learn from Oakland County," said Spanos. "I have a lot of respect for those leaders from Otsego who took time from their busy schedule to come down, make new friendships, and learn from colleagues from one of the strongest, longest running economic development groups in the state."