



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 15, 2004

CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Angelynne Amores	312/636.6148 (cell)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.7168 (Opp. Returns)

GOVERNOR BLAGOJEVICH NAMES *OPPORTUNITY RETURNS* REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR SOUTHEASTERN REGION

Former Effingham Economic Development Leader Henry Stephens to Head Unprecedented Effort to Create Jobs for Thirteen-County Area

SPRINGFIELD - Governor Rod Blagojevich today named former Effingham City Attorney Henry Stephens as the regional director of the Southeastern region for *Opportunity Returns*, the Governor's comprehensive economic development plan to spur growth and create jobs. Stephens served as the City Attorney of Effingham for 19 years, all of which were spent working in economic development efforts for the city. He will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the *Opportunity Returns* plan for the Southeastern region.

"I'm thrilled that Hank Stephens will be leading *Opportunity Returns* in the Southeastern region. Hank has dedicated his professional life to public service and working to bring positive and lasting change to this region. Through his prolific community and civic involvement in economic development, he has gained an acute awareness of the economic forces at work in the region and, more importantly, an intimate understanding of the targeted support businesses need to thrive in this part of our state. His experience and leadership will be a wonderful asset to this region and to ensuring that its communities reach their vast economic potential," Governor Blagojevich said.

The Governor's innovative *Opportunity Returns* program for the Southeastern region will be unveiled soon and will target key areas such as business retention, education and job training, agriculture and improving public infrastructure. Administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), *Opportunity Returns* contains specific actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to business.

"Hank Stephens is a great choice to lead the Governor's initiative in the Southeastern region because he has worked frequently and tirelessly with federal, state, and local governments over the years to create a positive environment for economic development in Effingham County and the surrounding areas. He'll build on the relationships and contacts he has already formed to ensure that the Governor's plan is a huge success throughout our region," said State Representative Bill Grunloh of the 108th District.

(more)

“The Governor has made an excellent selection with Hank Stephens. As the city attorney for so many years, Hank has been presented with a wide array of challenges and dealt with a diverse number of interests, but he always answers the bell. He is an innovative thinker who finds creative solutions to local challenges. He is exactly the person we want to continue our fight for better jobs and more economic growth in the Southeastern region,” State Representative Roger Eddy of the 109th District said.

Stephens has roots that run deep in the Southeastern region. He has 23 years of experience working in economic development for the city of Effingham, initially as an elected member of the city council and followed by 19 years as City Attorney. During that period, he served as Chairman of the Effingham Industrial Commission as well as Director of the Effingham Civic Foundation. Working alongside the mayor and city staff, Stephens helped successfully create and develop three Tax Increment Finance Districts, as well as found the Effingham City-County Enterprise Zone. Stephens has also served as a trustee of Lakeland Community College and a board member of the East Central Illinois Development Corporation.

“There is no greater priority in the Southeastern region than finding more effective ways to create and retain quality jobs. Over the course of his professional career, Hank has excelled in this capacity. He has hands-on experience in numerous retention efforts, including the successful fight to keep Fedders Corporation in Effingham in the 1980’s, as well as landing a Krispy Kreme Doughnuts manufacturing and distribution facility for Effingham. Hank is the right individual to lead the Governor’s strategic plan and help deliver real results for the Southeastern region,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

“I’d like to thank the Governor for this wonderful opportunity. What is so encouraging about the Governor’s *Opportunity Returns* initiative is that it is based on feedback from business, labor, and civic leaders throughout the Southeastern region; it reflects their priorities. Because of that legwork, the resources dedicated to this effort are in a position to produce positive returns for the region immediately. I feel that the more than 20 years of experience I have responding to the challenges and needs of our region’s communities have prepared me for this important position. I can’t wait to get started,” Stephens said.

The *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois’ history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn’t work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort is a product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from. The Governor has already unveiled plans for six of the ten regions – the Northern Stateline, Northwest, Southern, North Central, Southwest and West Central regions. He will be announcing the plans for the East Central, Southeast, Central and Northeast regions in the coming months.

The Southeastern region encompasses the counties of Clark, Clay, Coles, Crawford, Cumberland, Edgar, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Lawrence, Marion, Moultrie, and Richland.

Interview will be available at www.state.il.us/iisradio/ori.htm

#####