

Seeking a better Southwest Michigan

Business, community
leaders launch
strategic effort

By HP STAFF

BENTON HARBOR — Fewer jobs and fewer people have spawned creation of the Great Southwest Strategic Leadership Council, a panel of business and community leaders set to explore trends, the council announced Tuesday.

The organization first met in September at the invitation of Jeff Fettig, chairman and CEO of Whirlpool Corp., and Dr. Loren Hamel, president and CEO of Lakeland HealthCare.

"Despite hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment, along with significant employment gains by Whirlpool Corp., Lakeland HealthCare and others, our area has seen a 9.4 percent loss of overall employment and a 4.1 percent loss of population during the past decade that is adversely impacting state funding for our schools and local communities," Fettig said, according to the council's news release.

The announcement said "The Leadership Council will not create a road map or a prescriptive set of changes. Rather, the idea is to engage business, education, nonprofit and government leaders to agree on a vision and help prioritize the areas whereby collaboration can help move our community to top tier in terms of services, education and economic growth."

The organization met again Nov. 4-5 to discuss the positive changes that have occurred during the past decade and assess what the future holds for Berrien County communities.

There have been similar efforts in the past, but the council's announcement said this effort seeks "is looking at all sectors of the community, including education, business, nonprofit agencies and the government sector."

Other members are: Ken Ankli, Lisa Cripps, Ann Dahmer, Gary Easterling, John Egelhaaf, Philip Freeman, Mike Garey, the Rev. Ken Gavin, Joel Gebbie, Todd Gustafson, Bill Hanley, Merlin Hanson, Bob Harrison, James Hightower, John Janick, Nora Jefferson, Lynn Kerber, Jim Kodis, Bill Marohn, Honorable Mabel Mayfield, Anna Murphy, Jeff Noel, Brian Saxton, Dick Stauffer, Roger Seely, Steve Upton and Larry Weber.