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DELPHOS — More than 30 Delphos Area Chamber of Commerce members learned there could be a few surprises in store for Allen and Van Wert counties this year as far as economic development. Commissioners and economic development heads spoke at a meet-and-greet Wednesday at a noon luncheon and answered questions about their respective county's prospects for growth.

Van Wert County Commissioner Thad Lichtensteiger said his county was poised on the edge.

"The county has a lot of energy for economic development both individually and corporately right now. This could be a new age for Van Wert County," Lichtensteiger said.

County Economic Development Director Cindy Leis agreed, "We have a lot of projects available," she said. "We have a 1,600-acre mega-site ready to go."

Allen County Commissioner Cory Noonan said his county was also focusing on economic development.

## County officials talk growth

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"We have a lot to offer and people are looking at us," Noonan said. "We always want to attract new business and keep the ones we have. Nearly 80 percent of growth comes from existing businesses."

County Economic Director Jeff Sprague said Allen County is eying U.S. 30.

"We are looking for continuity," he said. "U.S. 30 is a major artery for us and a tremendous asset. We need to learn how to market it."

The group also included Allen County Commissioners Gary Sneary and Jay Begg and Van Wert County Commissioner Stan Owens, who joined their peers in answering questions from the audience.

"What are you guys hearing about health care in 2014?" asked Karen Grothouse of Spherion Staffing Services.

Leis answered first.

"The jury is still out on the impact on businesses and until we know, I think a lot of companies will pull back on plans they may have for growth," she said.

Spraguesaid he hoped businesses would become more proactive.

"We need our companies to call their representatives and voice their concerns," he said. "They need to know what the impact of these issues are and how they are effecting them."

The performance of JobsOhio was thrown out next. While the panel didn't have a lot to say about Governor John Kasich's jobs plan, which is still in its infancy, they did address a problem that they felt had an impact on all county governments and economic development - the attractiveness of starting or moving a business to Ohio.

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"We keep losing our prospects to Indiana and they have made a lot of changes as far as how they treat businesses," Lichtensteiger said, receiving head nods from the panel. "They have a definite advantage. Ohio needs tax reform, torte reform and Worker's Compensation reform. We don't have a lot of control over the resources that bring about big economic development."

Following the luncheon, Allen County Commissioners and both economic development directors visited three local businesses: Vanamatic Co., Lakeview Farms and RTH Processing.