

area's 'bests' rank as best

Development group gains attention in national contest

By Laura Cook
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Hard work by the St. Cloud Economic Development Partnership has paid off.

"We tend to keep our head down and do our jobs," said Tony Goddard, president of the partnership.



Tony Goddard
PARTNERSHIP
PRESIDENT

Goddard this summer won the first-place award for a series of advertisements promoting St. Cloud that he developed and placed in Corporate Report Minnesota. Awarded by the American Economic Development Council, the recognition hails Goddard's plan to draw new businesses to the St. Cloud area as the best in the magazine ad category, among 1,200 entries in about 25 categories.

"So there was competition," Goddard said.

And there was help. Mark Thelen of Thelen Advertising took Goddard's idea and put it to paper.

"Mark is very much responsible for taking my vague idea and making it into something worthwhile," Goddard said.

That was not a particularly

difficult task for Thelen, who well knows the goals the partnership is seeking to meet: one of them is bringing new and expansion businesses to the St. Cloud area.

It all started with superlatives — parts of daily life that St. Cloud does "best." Thelen sought to make that word leap off the magazine ads by pairing it with phrases like "best schools in the nation," "best business people," "best place in Minnesota to raise a family," and "Minnesota's best health care system."

"We tried to paint St. Cloud in strong superlatives, yet we had to be telling the truth," Thelen said.

Goddard did the digging for each category to find information to prove each claim. For example, one ad in the series of four cites St. Cloud-area business people winning the Minnesota Small Business Association entrepreneur of the year title three of the past five years.

The ads target top executives all over the state. Goddard hopes some of them are considering expansion sites.

"We want the words 'St. Cloud' to pop into their heads," he said. "We're trying to tell people St. Cloud is a special place."

With the research behind the ads, potential businesses may find it hard to argue.

"It's not just us tooting our own horn. It's based on fact," Goddard said.

Goddard is realistic the ads



TIMES PHOTO BY JASON WACHTER

Mark Thelen, Thelen Advertising, worked on ads for the St. Cloud Economic Development Partnership that won

a first-place award. A display (right) shows the series of ads promoting St. Cloud.

won't mean people flocking to St. Cloud immediately. The ads have generated calls, but no new business deals are firm yet.

"We haven't been flooded with leads, but it does get noticed," said Goddard, who believes the ads are a "long-term investment in the community."

The advertisements have run every other month for the past 18 months or so. By playing up St. Cloud's strong points, Goddard hopes to draw people into town who maybe haven't seen how much it has grown and changed in recent years.

"You have no sense of what St. Cloud has become" if you drive by on U.S. Highway 10 or Interstate Highway 94, Goddard said.

Another factor with which

Goddard and Thelen had to contend was a relatively small budget. The partnership operates on less than \$20,000 a year.

"We had to make (the ads) pop out of the page" without the size and color more expensive ads provide, Thelen said.

He also said executives have to be thinking expansion for the ads to catch their eyes.

"If they're in a mode where they're looking at cities, St. Cloud is going to jump out at them."

Thelen said it is good for people already living in the St. Cloud area to see how their community rates.

"It's a good internal message," he said.

The St. Cloud Area Economic

Development Partnership is comprised of public and private entities that share the common goal of keeping businesses here and encouraging new ones to consider St. Cloud as their potential new home. Partners in the effort include Benton, Stearns and Sherburne counties; the cities of St. Cloud, Becker, St. Joseph, Sauk Rapids and Sartell; as well as St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce and Northern States Power Co.

"We don't compete. We work with them," Goddard said.

His group often does the front-end work and then specific entities take it from there. The St. Cloud Area Economic Development Partnership also

seeks to make contacts through direct mail to target industrial sectors.

The partnership also received an award for a publication bankers and accountants use as a reference tool for finding technical assistance and financing programs.

As for further promoting St. Cloud, Thelen Advertising, the partnership and the St. Cloud Area Convention and Visitors Bureau are developing television ads to be aired in the Twin Cities area. Thelen plans to approach St. Cloud State University about companion spots highlighting, again, what's good about the St. Cloud area and why businesses and families would want to move here.