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InterCity Leadership group returns from Texas trip

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Seventy-four area executives and community leaders earlier this week returned from a three-day trip to Austin, Texas, this year's destination for the annual InterCity Leadership Visit sponsored by the **Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce** and **St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce**.

The trip from Sunday to Tuesday especially focused on at Opportunity Austin, a privately led effort coordinated by the **Austin Chamber of Commerce** that works to expand the economic vitality in the area of Texas' capital city.

Twin Cities business leaders would like to launch a similar regional economic-development organization in the Twin Cities. The Itasca Project, a local group comprising dozens of high-level CEOs and other executives, [plans to choose an executive to run such an organization that would start operations early next year](#).

Todd Klingel, president of the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, said the Austin trip was "one of the best" because the participants wanted to study first-hand what Opportunity Austin is doing.

"The participants are really legitimately receptive to taking a regional approach in this market," Klingel said.

Bloomington Mayor **Gene Winstead** was on the trip and acknowledged that Twin Cities leaders need to "get on the same song sheet and promote what we are." He believes the Itasca Project's plans could help do that.

In a Wednesday e-mail to his board members, the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce's president and CEO **Matt Kramer** said he was struck by the "importance the Austin folks placed on business retention."

"Attracting a new business to move into a community may make the evening news, but day-to-day success comes from recognizing the critical role that existing businesses play in our economic success. ... We will continue to emphasize business retention as the key component in this Chamber's economic development strategy," Kramer said.

The trip cost \$2,095 per person and included both Minneapolis Mayor **R.T. Rybak** and St. Paul Mayor **Chris Coleman**. Companies with executives participating included **General Mills Inc.**, **HealthPartners** and **Wells Fargo & Co.** Inc. [Click here to view a full list of who went on the trip](#).

Among those on the trip was **David Rom**, president and CEO of Oakdale-based Platinum Bank. He noticed that public officials and business leaders "know how to get things done" in Austin, and he hoped that Twin Cities public officials on the trip learned something from that.

Goff & Howard's Mike Zipko also went to Austin, and [said in a blog post](#) that the group learned how Austin has been able to retain existing companies and attract new businesses to the area.

Andrea Walsh, HealthPartner's executive vice president and chief marketing officer, said "job growth and economic development are priorities for us."

"It will take deliberate focus, commitment of resources and a partnership between the public and private sectors to make strong gains here at home," said Walsh, who is also chairwoman of the **Minnesota Chamber of Commerce's** board of directors.

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