



Illinois  
Department of Commerce  
& Economic Opportunity  
JB Pritzker, Governor

## REALWHEELS INVESTS \$6 MILLION TO EXPAND INTO 65,000 SQ. FT. FACILITY & CREATE NEW JOBS IN LAKE COUNTY

*Incentive Package Supports Homegrown Company's Growth in Zion*

**Zion, Illinois, September 26, 2023** — RealWheels Corporation joined local leaders and officials together today in celebration of the advanced manufacturing company's expansion at 3905 Route 173 in Zion, Illinois. RealWheels recently completed the move-in, following its renovation of the 65,000 sq. ft. facility to accommodate continued growth and new product development.

What initially started as a DIY wheel cover project by Founder and President Jan Polka has developed into a thriving business with over a dozen U.S. patents, offering hundreds of products to customers around the world.

"As a former owner/operator of my own Kenworth truck and gravel trailer, I always looked for opportunities to make my vehicle stand out. The cast-spoke wheels weren't attractive, and I wanted to find a way to dress them up," said **Polka**. "I began fabricating my own wheel covers out of my home garage. I got them chrome plated, and they looked great. Other drivers started asking me where they could get them. In response to demand, my wife Sherri and I began manufacturing and marketing wheel covers at night from our home in Lake County. Sherri came up with the name "RealWheels." I realized that there was nothing like them on the market, and so I applied for and received my first patent. From there, we moved the operation to a 2,500 sq. ft. industrial building and began the first of many expansions. Today, we employ 60 people, and 99% of our products are proudly made in the United States. Lake County has been instrumental to our success. In deciding where to grow, we wanted to stay true to our roots. Zion is the perfect place for our next stage of growth."

"RealWheels is a true homegrown success story," said **City of Zion Mayor Bill McKinney**. "The company's investment will benefit our community by creating new jobs, providing opportunities for future growth, reactivating the site, and advancing our goal of developing the major intersection at Route 173 and Kenosha Road. It was rewarding to collaborate with our partners at the state of Illinois and Lake County Partners to make this deal happen."

RealWheels leveraged TIF, EDGE and Enterprise Zone incentives to finance the project.

"The State of Illinois remains committed to supporting new and expanding businesses that will contribute to our world-class workforce, infrastructure, and economy across the state," said **DCEO Director Kristin Richards**. "By offering competitive incentive packages, the

State is giving homegrown companies like RealWheels the resources and opportunities needed to continue to grow and invest in Illinois.”

“RealWheels’ investment builds on the company’s decades-long contribution to Lake County’s rich tradition of manufacturing—a \$20 billion industry and the largest contributor to our gross regional product,” noted **Lake County Board Chair Sandy Hart**. “One out of every six local jobs is in advanced manufacturing, which is more than any other private sector industry. The success is a result of Lake County’s spirit of collaboration, workforce strength and strategic business support. We are honored that RealWheels has once again chosen to grow here.”

“RealWheels is an important name on an impressive roster of businesses that call Lake County home,” said **Steve Madden, the Chair of Lake County Partners’ Board of Governors and CEO of Libertyville Bank & Trust**. “The company joins other manufacturing leaders like Carlson Labs, Roncadin Pizza, Henry Broch Foods, Diversified Food Services Supply, Encore Packaging and NorthStar Pickles that are planning to expand in Lake County this year. In fact, over the past 8 months alone, Lake County Partners’ business development work has resulted in nearly 700 new jobs, over 500 retained jobs and a whopping \$316 million in direct investment—much of it in manufacturing. Based on our outreach, we expect the upward trajectory to continue.”

### **About Lake County Partners**

Lake County Partners is a 501(c)(3) economic development corporation that works to maintain economic vitality in Lake County, Illinois by creating and retaining quality jobs, stimulating capital investment, and pursuing economic diversity. Lake County promises businesses a highly educated workforce, beautiful and diverse recreational areas, a gateway to global markets, the right balance between work and play, top-ranking schools nationwide, world-class healthcare in your backyard, global industry leaders, and a first-rate quality of life.

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