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SCEDD News

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Community Focus – Aurora

Submitted by Eddie Ranson

The core of Aurora's economic development success is a long-term strategy to grow and diversify the local economy. A shared vision among local leaders, volunteers and business owners has contributed toward that strategy over 40 years in what we like to call "The Aurora Story."

That "story" has numerous chapters, all of which paint a picture of steady growth and progress. To help illustrate how that shared vision has made an impact, one chapter at a time, here is a one specific success story involving a dynamic software development company which many rural communities would love to call their own.

In 1998, Jim Anderson was happily managing Software 4 Retail Solutions, a company which writes back office software for the grocery industry in Lakewood, Colo. Some of Jim's best programmers lived in Central Nebraska and they refused to relocate to Denver office. At their urging, he looked in to bringing the company here.

When Aurora's Hamilton Telecommunications learned of Software 4, they offered Jim high-capacity DSL lines, complete networking and telecommunications support and a server farm enabling S4 to provide data warehousing to its customers. By comparison, Lakewood did not even offer ISDN lines. According to Jim, telecommunication resources in Aurora were so far ahead in 1998, he was confident they would stay ahead in the future.

Then Jim learned that Aurora offered other advantages. Office rent in Aurora was one-quarter what he was paying in Denver. Aurora had all the infrastructure and business support needed to nurture his company. And then there was the quality of life. Jim, and his employees, would be able to raise their families away from the big-city environment but be in easy driving distance of metropolitan areas.

Since moving Software 4 to Aurora, Jim's business has grown steadily. It now employs 16 people. It's turned out that farmers, problem-solvers and self-reliant by nature, make excellent programmers. After several years of continued growth, S4 expanded in to Aurora's Technology Center, a facility built for info-tech businesses and entrepreneurs.

While S4's story is an exciting example of rural economic development, the story is not unusual for Aurora. Long known as being a good place to live and raise a family, this community of 4,250 people 20 miles east of Grand Island has long had a "recipe for success" for fostering business growth while maintaining an excellent quality of life. The attractive neighborhoods on brick streets, unique stores surrounding the handsome Courthouse Square and excellent school and medical facilities bring native sons and daughters back to town, and welcome newcomers as well.

For more than 50 years, community leaders have provided the Aurora area with building blocks for a balanced community. With a solid base of successful farming in Hamilton County, Aurora works to maintain and grow its population, supporting agriculture with industry, education and tourism. There are five major employers in Aurora, including two strong agribusiness manufacturers.

With an emphasis on quality business and community life, Aurora has created building blocks to accommodate future growth. Affordable housing is and has long been a priority. The community understands that business cannot grow without a sufficient labor pool. This means places for people to live. Careful thought is continually given to the balance of available apartments, single-family homes and retirement options in Hamilton County. As one housing sub-division fills, additional land is made available to home builders.

Aurora is known for its spirit of volunteerism. More than 30 local community volunteer organizations operate in Aurora, working for the betterment of the community. Each takes on projects in cooperation with the county, city and business community to make continuous improvements to our community.

It would be hard for a business to find a place in Nebraska where people have a stronger set of community facilities or better managed finances and community philanthropy. A substantial portion of Aurora's infrastructure has been built with private contributions rather than tax dollars. The combined total of location foundations now tops \$40 million, which provides scholarships and seed money for local projects, year in and year out. This commitment to private funding has saved taxpayers millions of dollars and given the community ownership and pride in these excellent facilities.

News Around the Region

South Central Economic Development District Hires Business Facilitator



Sharon Hueftle
SCEDD Executive Director

The South Central Economic Development District welcomed their first full-time Executive Director and Business Facilitator December first of 2005. Sharon Hueftle of Eustis was named to the position by the Board of Directors. Sharon comes to the Development District with fifteen years of business facilitation experience, serving most recently as Economic Development Finance Specialist for West Central Nebraska Development District and Program Manager for the Tri-EDGE Coalition. Timothy Loewenstein (immediate Past President) said: "I was thrilled to hear that Sharon would be willing to come onboard with SCEDD. Her experience and personal wisdom in the business development and facilitation arena are unmatched in Central Nebraska." According to Sharon, "South Central Economic Development District is a train that's moving forward, and I'm excited to be on board." Sharon and her husband Bruce have four children and recently relocated to Holdrege.

Ethanol Plant Planned for Phelps County

Reprinted from Alcorn Energy Press Release June 19, 2006

The South Central Economic Development District exists to develop and promote a positive economic climate, which supports regional growth.

The Phelps County Development Corporation and Alcorn Energy, LLC are excited to announce that Alcorn Energy, LLC of Troy, Michigan has filed an air permit application with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to construct an ethanol plant nine miles west of Holdrege, NE in Phelps County. Alcorn Energy selected the site from a number of ethanol-ready sites in Nebraska after visiting the site in February, 2006. The Phelps County Development Corporation and Nebraska Public Power District hosted the site visit.

"This is an exciting development opportunity for Phelps County," said Scott Latter, President of the Phelps County Development Corporation. "PCDC has worked very closely with NPPD and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to position Phelps County to attract value-added industries. At the same time, we set our standards very high. Our Board wanted a company that had a vision and plan for long term sustainability, environmental quality, with a desire to be a good corporate citizen and work with local industries. We feel very strongly that Alcorn Energy exceeds those standards, and we are very excited that they chose to locate their plant in Phelps County. The positive economic impact to the area will be significant and widespread," he said.

The site near Holdrege, NE consists of over 200 acres on Highway 23 between the towns of Loomis and Bertrand. "We are excited about the opportunity to build an ethanol plant in Phelps County," said Tom Randazzo, CEO of Alcorn Energy. "The Phelps County location has all of the features and benefits that we believe are necessary for the successful operation of our ethanol plant," he said.

The air permit application is for the construction of a 125 million gallon per year, dry mill plant which will consume over 40 million bushels of corn per year. Investment of over \$150 million is anticipated and, when operational, the plant will have 40 to 50 employees. The plant will burn coal as its main energy source, with a fully redundant gas-fired boiler system.

Randazzo said that one of the most important considerations in the site selection was the abundant corn supply in Phelps County and the surrounding counties. Because of the large consumption of corn, ethanol plants have a significant impact on the local agricultural economy. "Local corn supply is very important to us and we are excited to also announce that Alcorn Energy has formed a strategic alliance with Agri Co-op to supply all of the corn for our plant operation," he said.

"Agri Co-op is committed to advancing local agriculture and is very excited about the opportunities that working with Alcorn Energy presents to the area and our owner members," Said Don Lien, President of Agri Co-op. "We know that ethanol is good for our country and we are proud to help support it by working with Alcorn Energy." Agri Co-op is a producer-owned cooperative with annual sales over \$150 million and has approximately 150 employees in many communities spread throughout South Central Nebraska.

Construction of the plant can start when an air permit is issued by the NDEQ. The NDEQ review process is expected to take 4 to 6 months to complete. The plant is expected to be operational 14 to 16 months after construction begins.

News Around the Region

Aerospace Company Buys Up Balance of Industrial Park

Reprinted from the Hastings Tribune

Telesis Technology Corp. of Palmetto, Fla., announced Monday it would move its corporate headquarters and majority operations [to Superior], investing about \$2 million in buildings, equipment, improvements and jobs. The company has signed an agreement to purchase the entire Kottmeyer Industrial Park, bringing the area of their campus here to about 35 acres. The City of Superior has designated One Telesis Drive as the corporate address.

Telesis is a multimillion-dollar aerospace and defense contractor. It is a leader in the manufacture of replacement aircraft components and assemblies, from complex rigid parts to precision engineered components, with customers spanning the globe. The company's stock is traded publicly under the stock symbol TLST.

In 2004, Telesis purchased 15 acres at the west edge of the park and a 20,000 square-foot metal building which the Economic Development Committee had built in speculation. They have transformed the building into an assembly and distribution plant, with Steve Gunn serving as construction foreman. Warehouse operations have begun, with three employees at the present, and an anticipated increase to five to 10. About six to eight trucks a week are here conducting business. Traffic is expected to increase once the streets and access roads are constructed.

The City of Superior has contracted with Werner Construction Co. of Hastings to extend Sixth Street into the Kottmeyer area as soon as weather allows. Hasit Vibhakar, president of Telesis, said the move was part of an overall strategy to consolidate Telesis' operations and all its facilities under one [roof]. Superior Chamber of Commerce, coordinated negotiations with Telesis, EDC, the chamber and the city. Recently, Jerry Grove served briefly as EDC president until he was appointed to the Superior City Council. Vibhakar said Grove was "a major driving force in making things happen faster than normal due to his aggressive and very effective style."

The EDC, city and Nuckolls County worked together to attract Telesis. The City Council voted on March 13 to make \$75,000 in sales tax money available to the Superior Development Corp. to be used as incentive to attract the Telesis corporate headquarters. At its meeting Monday, the Nuckolls County Commissioners pledged \$25,000 to the pot from next year's county budget. Vibhakar said he had purchased a residence in Superior and was glad to be returning to the Midwest. He is from St. Paul, Minn. He said he had found Superior to be a friendly and welcoming community.

Red Cloud hires City Administrator

Jay Hall comes to Red Cloud as city administrator armed with a vast resume in the fields of education, economic development and volunteer community activism. Jay will be working with the mayor and city council in promoting community development and in improving communications between Red Cloud's municipal government, the citizens and the many civic, church and youth groups. He will be exploring possible funding sources both inside the community as well as in state, federal and private programs. Jay believes strongly in regional cooperation, promoting entrepreneurship in the local area and capitalizing on the potential for growth in the areas of tourism and culture. "I think Red Cloud can and should also look at the area of Native American history and culture" he notes. "The strong possibility of an ethanol plant being built just outside Red Cloud is also very encouraging."

Hall is encouraging Red Cloud's residents to begin making a "wish list" of possible business opportunities and community improvement projects. He believes that open discussions and even some fanciful brainstorming can lead to new ideas that a large part of the community can agree upon and work with. He thinks that the old saying "Where there's a will, there's a way" needs to be adopted by small communities like Red Cloud. Even with limited resources, Jay reasons that a community with commitment, enthusiasm, faith and hard working citizens can work miracles.

Jay Hall has done graduate research and teaching in Stockholm, Sweden; London, England; Sydney, Australia and Beijing, China. He graduated from UNL with a degree in international relations and worked as the assistant dean of studies at the ABF College in Stockholm. Hall was a professor of business administration at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing and also worked for the World Food Program, an agency of the United Nations.

A native of Beaver City, NE he grew up on a farm and graduated from high school in that Furnas County town of 641. After 25 years overseas, Hall returned to Nebraska and Beaver City in 1999. He worked for the Chamber of Commerce in his hometown and did volunteer work for the Nebraska Development District-Southwest Regional Group, the Furnas/Harlan Partnership and the SW NE RC&D.



Jay Hall
Red Cloud City Administrator

News Around the Region

NebraskaEDGE Community Certification Training

The Kearney Holiday Inn Express was the setting of the first NebraskaEDGE (Enhancing, Developing, and Growing Entrepreneurs) Community Certification Training Thursday, June 15, 2006. The South Central Economic Development District was well represented with twelve participants grasping the benefits of a community coalition focused on entrepreneur development. EDGE is a twelve week course for business owners in any stage, particularly starting-up, expanding, struggling, or wanting to exit. It provides a step by step approach to completing a business plan with the assistance of an instructor, guest speakers, and coalition members. It is the goal of SCEDD to have at least three EDGE Coalitions in the District by 2007. Aurora Area EDGE and PK EDGE (Phelps & Kearney Counties) are already forming with classes to be offered this winter. To learn more about NebraskaEDGE, see their website at <http://nebraskaedge.unl.edu>.



Calendar of Events – July - September

July 4th - Clay Center parade, ice cream social, BBQ, kids games and fireworks

July 11 South Platte United Chamber of Commerce (SPUCC) Golf Day in Clay Center

July 21-22 Holdrege Sidewalk Sales

July 23-27 Phelps County Fair

July 27 SCEDD Board Meeting in Minden

August 8 SPUCC Meet the Candidates BBQ at Jeffrey Lake

August 11-13 - Women's Wilderness Weekend program at Harlan County Lake, for more information contact Trailblazer RC&D 402-746-3560

August 12-13 - Deweese Festival, Demo Derby and other activities

August 31 SCEDD Board Meeting in Merrick County

Sept. 8-9 - Scrap tire recycling at Nelson and Franklin. For more information contact Trailblazer RC&D 402-746-3560

Sept 9 Heartland Cruisers Car Show in Holdrege

Sept. 9th and 10th - OLD TRUSTY Days in Clay Center, activities include steam engines, tractors, horses, a flea market, cars, tractor pulls and a show in the grandstand arena featuring Oliver, Hart-Parr Engines G,H,I

Sept 12 SPUCC Meeting in Curtis

Sept 19-21 Nebraska Rural Institute, Ainsworth

Sept 28, SCEDD Board Meeting in Nuckolls County

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.scedd.us

To have your event included in this newsletter, please email events to sharonh@scedd.us

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