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State, county poised for new growth

by Tom Busselberg

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FARMINGTON — “We’re doing economic development like we’ve never done it before.”

County Commissioner Louenda Downs made that comment, recently, probably as appropriate as ever in today’s recession.

“The county, the Davis Entrepreneur Center, Chamber of Commerce, we’re all working together like never before,” she told the Clipper editorial board recently.

“Now we’re one of the big players in the state and nation,” Downs said, noting the state’s continuing low unemployment compared to the nation, and its relatively robust economic condition.

“California, particularly with its high tax situation,” is causing some companies to look, and move, elsewhere, said County Commission Chair Bret Millburn.

“She (Downs) has really jumped into this (economic development) with both feet,” he said. “There is excitement going on. There are great synergies being put together.”

Downs outlined one of her first goals to be implemented as a new commissioner, 2 1/2 years ago, was to work toward updating the county’s economic master plan. Even as a private citizen, she had chaired the county economic plan effort.

That led to creation of DEAC, the Davis Economic Advisory Council, made up of more than 70 people from all walks of life from across the county.

That group meets once or twice a year as a big group, and more often in a half dozen sub-groups, where such issues as quality of life are included in the mix.

Davis County joined the Economic Development Corporation of Utah (EDCU), recently, as well, and is already reaping benefits, the commissioners said.

For example, the county’s Economic Development Department is working with EDCU on compiling a list of sites basically market-ready for showing to interested firms. As previously noted in the Clipper, they’re called Sure Sites.

Those sites range from about five acres and up, and often include buildings as large as 30,000 square feet, said County Commissioner John Petroff.

“They really hit the ground running,” Millburn said, speaking of the county’s new Economic Development Department. It was created along with a Planning Department, but without adding staff numbers.

Marlin Eldred was hired as an economic development specialist, bringing years of experience in Southeastern Utah and South Central Idaho, among other places.

The utahpulse.com Zions Bank website said of Eldred and Davis County's efforts recently: "With leadership from Eldred, Davis County is working to grow its incentive opportunities and strengthen its site selection process.

"Marlin has an excellent perspective on the importance of the county working together with its cities for common goals. He plans to focus on marketing and business expansion and recently started the Davis County Economic Forum, a group that consists of public and private leaders focused on economic development."

He replaced Kent Sulser, who assumed the new Economic Development Director role. At the same time, though, Wilf Sommerkorn, who used to be director of a combined economic development and planning office, left for a planning position in Salt Lake City.

Meanwhile, Barry Burton became Planning Director, moving up from the deputy position. No other staff was hired.

"The cities have been waiting for help" in identifying and marketing such sites, and now have a way to do it, Downs said.

"We're poised for greatness, have great momentum," she said in terms of economic/job growth.

"We are becoming one of the prime players" in the state, commissioners agreed, aided by such factors as strong legislative leadership drawn from the county.

Sheldon Killpack of Syracuse is Majority Leader of the Senate and Kevin Garn of Layton holds the same position in the House of Representatives.

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