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Executive Director Report



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As part of its’ mission of leading the Federal Government’s overall economic development agenda and providing financial assistance to rural and urban distressed communities, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) requires regional economic development planning organizations, such as SEWEDA, to develop and implement Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). Development of the CEDS must be “a continuous process involving the active participation of private sector representatives, public officials and private citizens, and include:

- a. Analyzing local economies;
- b. Defining economic development goals;
- c. Determining project opportunities; and,
- d. Formulating and implementing an economic development program that includes systematic efforts to reduce unemployment and increase incomes.”

The EDA also requires the CEDS plan to be updated at least every five years, unless EDA or the planning organization determines that a new or revised CEDS is required earlier due to changed circumstances.

Aside from the on-going planning mandates required through the EDA, SEWEDA continues to evolve its’ short- and long-term plans as conditions change and opportunities arise at the national, state and local levels. Each county in our region has or will soon make modifications to its project (or action) list to recognize project completions and/or new project priorities. Columbia and Garfield Counties have had ongoing planning meetings over the past two months. Likewise, the Managing Directors (ADO’s) in Whitman and Asotin Counties are reaching out to constituents within their Counties to update their economic development action plans.

In coming months, members of the SEWEDA Board of Directors and staff will be participating in two strategic planning sessions to discuss recent and projected changes in the socio-economic conditions of the region, and how those changes might impact our economic development objectives and strategies for achieving them.

Since the 2008 CEDS plan was developed for Southeast Washington, significant socio-economic changes have taken place at all levels of our society. Beginning in 2008 the economy underwent a virtual downward spiral, unseen since the depression of the 1930s. National unemployment exceeded 10%, credit markets evaporated, the housing market collapsed, and major shifts occurred in industry forecasts. (Continued)

Executive Director Report (cont.)

Government sector employment, so prominent in the economies of our small rural communities, has been frozen or significantly diminished as an outcome of shortfalls in federal, state and local budgets.

While much of the economic news over the past two years has been negative, there have also been significant positive changes recently that have greatly impacted our local economies and future opportunities. Wind power and other “green” energy sources, and smart grid systems have made the news in a big way and have drawn significant attention to our region. As the lead economic development organization in the four counties, SEWEDA will continue to monitor and evaluate these changes and develop strategies for taking advantage of them as we move forward.

Asotin County



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Farmers Insurance Ranks Lewiston, Idaho and Clarkston, Washington the #1 Most Secure Place to Live in America for Small Towns!

In this time of economic uncertainty, a safe and secure environment in which to live, work and raise a family has become an even greater priority to many Americans. Farmers Insurance recently ranked Clarkston Washington as the most secure small town (population less than 150,000). "Farmers congratulates all of the communities ranking in the Farmers Most Secure Places to Live study." In today's fast-paced world, citizens look for a strong local government to make their communities secure and especially desirable for individuals and families to live, work and grow,"

The Lewiston-Clarkston area, with a population of just under 59,000, jumped from sixth place among small towns in the 2008 Farmers study to the top spot in 2009. The area's access to the Pacific Ocean through a network of river, rail and highway transportation facilities provides an excellent business climate for what is regarded as the most inland seaport in the Western U.S. It scored high in the study due to excellent job growth, low crime and minimal housing depreciation.

City of Clarkston Awarded Grant Monies

The City of Clarkston has received grant money from the Small Communities Rural Counties Grant program in the amount of \$334,610 to benefit the Downtown Clarkston 6th Street Lighting Project. Out of 212 applications requesting \$156,047,037, the City of Clarkston was awarded this money as part of the downtown revitalization efforts being led by the Heart of Clarkston Action Group.

Downtown revitalization is identified as a goal of the community in the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy which includes installing new light poles in Clarkston. The new, tall poles will include banner brackets, and the pedestrian poles will have electrical capabilities along with brackets to hang flower baskets. Adding pedestrian lights will increase the safety of the downtown area and adjacent city park and school property, enhance and compliment the appearance of Clarkston and the activities that are bringing people together on Sixth Street.

Cruise Ship Planning Session

Cruise boats are a big part of the tourism economy of the Lewis Clark Valley. The Port of Clarkston partnered with SEWEDA, the Clarkston Chamber of Commerce and the Hells Canyon Visitors Bureau to host a meeting to talk about cruise boats and their impact. The Port Operations Manger for Lindblad Expeditions, which is Clarkston's longest visiting cruise line, said "it was a great opportunity to network with Valley companies that serve their passengers".



Columbia County



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Disaster Resistant Business Training

Columbia County will host a **Disaster Resistant Business Training** seminar at the Columbia County Public Works office 8 – 10 a.m. on March 23rd. Attendees will receive a Disaster Resistant Business (DRB) Toolkit which can be used for unplanned disruptions, whether they are natural or man-made, large or small. The DRB Toolkit can be used to minimize risk through the process of creating or enhancing a disaster plan, training employees, and exercising business readiness against all hazards.

The Toolkit was developed by the DRB Toolkit Workgroup, 501(c)(3) non-profit, made up of experts from the public and private sectors, to meet the following objectives:

- Identify types of emergencies that may impact you.
- Understand how to prevent some emergencies.
- Be prepared to lessen the impacts of those emergencies that do occur.
- Respond to protect life and property.
- Recover and resume business operations in the post-emergency environment.

Statistics indicate that many small to midsize businesses fail to reopen after a disaster. This training class will provide a comprehensive, yet simplified approach for a business to build a disaster plan. You are the expert in your business. Attending this training will enable you to use your knowledge to create your disaster resistance business plan.

For more information, or to sign up for the training contact Lisa Ronnberg at 509-382-4825.

Lower Snake River Wind Energy Project – Columbia County

Columbia County will hold a public hearing on March 12th at the Seneca Activity Center in Dayton, regarding the Conditional Use Permit for the Lower Snake River Wind Energy Project. The public is invited to attend and provide written or oral comment. The Project builds on the success of the current Hopkins Ridge wind facility in Columbia County. The Project is designed to be built in phases with infrastructure construction to begin in Garfield County this year. The Columbia County portion is expected to have approximately 351 wind turbines at completion, with final installed wind turbine numbers and locations to be determined through the county permitting process and evaluation of environmental impact and available wind resources. Our area has a proven wind resource and has enjoyed the economic benefits of wind power since 2005.



Garfield County



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Community Planning Task Force Meetings

In an effort to optimize all the opportunities for Pomeroy and Garfield County that will come with the development of wind power farms over the next several years, SEWEDA has initiated the creation of a Community Planning Task Force for the purpose of *taking action* toward capitalizing on the economic opportunities that will result from the wind projects, and creating a better quality of life for Garfield County's residents. A series of two hour meetings for the Task Force were held on December 15th, January 13th and January 20th at Pomeroy High School. The meetings were open to the public and about 30 residents and community leaders attended.

The goal of the meetings was to develop both short- and long-term goals and objectives based on current community needs, assets and current and/or planned projects. Ultimately, the vision of the CP Task Force is to construct a strategic framework for building Pomeroy into a prosperous, thriving community, and use it to build a case for making it a center of commerce in Washington's emerging green economy. Several key issues were identified and 5 committees formed based on those issues including a Housing Committee, a Youth Activity Committee, a Beautification and Municipal Codes Committee, A Recreation Committee, and a Business & Services Committee. As well, citizen support and local organization coordination were addressed at the meetings. Each committee identified projects or initiatives that they would like to see developed in the short- and long-term, and then developed an action plan for the first several items on that list.

The work of the task force will continue with regular committee meetings, and a quarterly Task Force meeting for the larger group. The committees are still seeking helpers and are looking to community members for assistance. For a list of the committees, contact people and the work plans for each committee, contact Alesia Ruchert, SEWEDA, (509) 843-1104.

Workforce Development Grant Helps Area Students

SEWEDA has been assisting area middle and secondary school students to learn more about potential career fields in Garfield, Asotin, Whitman and Columbia Counties through a High Skills High Wages grant awarded to the association by the Workforce Development Council. The grant has provided funding for: teacher training in SolidWorks, a 3-D computer modeling program; collaborative Skills Panel meetings for educators and industry representatives; and, student involvement in regional career fairs. Most recently, the funds were utilized for transportation and staff coverage for both Asotin Jr. High and Pomeroy Jr. High schools to attend the annual Career Fair at Clarkston's Lincoln Middle School, which is sponsored by Clarkston Education Foundation.

This was a first for the middle school students at the outlying schools. These schools have not had the funding in the past to send their students to this important showcase of all the possible careers that are available in our region. It is truly a first step in workforce development for this generation and in the effort to retain this workforce in our rural counties. We are also working with Walla Walla Community College to send secondary school students from the four counties to a Career Fair on the Walla Walla campus for technical programs such as Machining, John Deere Diesel Mechanics, Nursing, Culinary, Renewable Energy Tech and Irrigation Technology.

The goal is to educate students on the training programs available for the career fields that are right here in their home counties, so that we can keep them here and grow our workforce and our communities. For further information on the grant work, contact Alesia Ruchert, SEWEDA Managing Director, Garfield County, (509) 843-1104

Whitman County



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It has been a mild winter on the Palouse which has resulted in an early start for construction activity. Walmart, located in Pullman, broke ground in December and is ahead of schedule for constructing their new store. The Walmart store will provide 350 jobs and is expected to be ready for a Grand Opening in late summer.

Port of Whitman

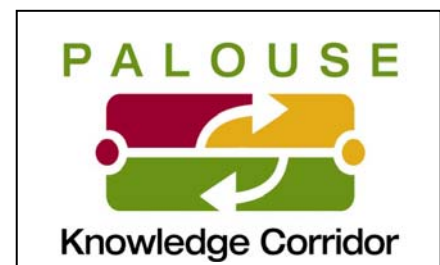
The Port is off to a busy start in 2010 with numerous transportation, infrastructure, and economic development projects. A \$64 million federal stimulus grant application has been compiled for rehabilitating the short line rail system. The Palouse Coulee City Rail Authority is developing a 10 year rehab plan and strategy for the rail system. The Port is working with NOANET, a not for profit broad band company, to extend the fiber optic network to underserved areas of Washington State. They have applied for a \$93.4M grant. The fiber would run from Spokane to the Lewis Clark Valley and serve libraries, hospitals and small towns. Finally, the Port has applied for a \$1.3M Washington State Department of Commerce CERB grant/loan to extend water and sewer lines, and build streets in its new Pullman Industrial Park West at the intersection of Albion Road and SR 26.

Business Plan Competition

The High School and Open Business Plan Competition, co-sponsored by SEWEDA, is set for Friday, April 23 at Washington State University. Recently, AVISTA pledged \$2000 towards the High School Competition, which brings the total award to \$8000. THANKS! The Open Competition, sponsored by the Port of Whitman will award \$15,000.

Palouse Knowledge Corridor

The Palouse Knowledge Corridor (PKC) is a branding concept built around the idea that like-minded businesses congregate together. The PKC strives to promote economic growth in the region by promoting the resources of the two research land-grant institutions, Washington State University and the University of Idaho, and a growing cluster of Technology businesses in the region.



The PKC held a seminar, co-sponsored by SEWEDA, on February 19th at Banyan's on the Ridge Event Center. The topic was "Where Innovation and Opportunity Meet: Successful Partnerships in the PKC". Presenters discussed how WSU and the U of I have successfully developed partnerships with businesses and their successes. www.palouseknowledgecorridor.com

Whitman County (cont.)

Smart Grid

A partnership between Avista Corp., Itron Inc., and Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories to invest \$38M to create a smart-grid community in Pullman has been established. A proven technology will allow the electric system to adjust to the changes in supply and demand, including the use of self-healing circuits that allow the distribution system to reconfigure itself during a power outage. An automated utility-meter technology lets individuals and business customers manage their energy use while giving utilities near real-time load tracking. The Pullman smart grid is part of a \$178M five-state smart grid in the Northwest.

New Businesses

Restaurants: (Colfax) - Toccata Blues Grill; (Pullman) – Abyelo’s Fine Mexican Dining, Loco Grinz Hawaiian BBQ and Southfork Public House

Other: (Uniontown) - Uniontown Mini Mart and Deli; (Pullman) - Palouse Marble and Granite; (Rosalia) Pinewood Cottage Retail Furniture and Consignment Arts and Crafts; (St. John) - Welcome Home (home décor and gifts), Ala Carte Deli and Gifts.

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