

New Growth Alliance off to a promising start

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News Record File Photo/ Ed Glazar

When touring northeast Wyoming as a potential place to locate a new business or industry, one of the first stops is usually the Dry Fork Station power plant north of Gillette. Not only is it one of the nation's newest coal-fired power plants, it's also the host site for the Integrated Test Center, which is under construction.

When pitching northeast Wyoming to site selectors to bring new industry and recruit larger firms to relocate or expand into new territory, Dave Simonsen likes to answer one question that is always everybody's first.

Why would I want to live in Wyoming?

"You're always going to get that initial reaction," Simonsen said. "It's our job to sell northeast Wyoming with the livability, recreation, excellent infrastructure and so much more."

Simonsen, an administrator with the Northeast Wyoming Growth Alliance, and the organization have been working for six months on bringing new businesses to the sparsely populated corner of Wyoming.

And they are “way beyond the schedule that I thought we’d be on,” he said.

Phil Christopherson, CEO of Energy Capital Economic Development based in Gillette, said the first site selector tour that will bring four to six selectors to northeast Wyoming is scheduled for late August.

“For the first year of this, we wanted to focus on manufacturing,” Christopherson said. “We’ve been to countless trade shows around the country to get northeast Wyoming on the map. If a company or business decides to relocate or expand, we want to be on that short list of places they’re willing to consider.”

The inception of the New Growth Alliance was born from the desire of industry expansion mixed with a population issue.

According to Christopherson, site consultants don’t start looking at a community until it has a population of 50,000 or more. Combined as a region, Gillette, Sheridan and Buffalo boast a potential workforce of about 80,000 people.

“The more site selectors that become aware of our area and what we have to offer, the better off we are,” Christopherson said.

While Christopherson was a little hesitant to outline the progress the organization has made so far, **Simonsen admitted that he has rounded up at least a dozen “hot leads”** from site selectors willing to discuss expanding or moving to northeast Wyoming.

“The way I define a hot lead is if a selector has requested additional information from us and have project plans in place in the next two years,” Simonsen said. “Those two things are key to a hot lead, knowing they have a project and knowing they’re interested.”

Simonsen said the trade shows they’ve attended have already paid off in ways he would have thought impossible this early in the game.

In September, Simonsen met executives in Chicago from a coding company called Interapt, based in Louisville, Kentucky.

That company has plans to visit the Buffalo area this month for the third time in less than a year.

“My goal when I’m talking to these site selectors is to hit on our excellent tax structure, our available properties and the overall quality of life,” Simonsen said. “I think we’ve put

together some great marketing materials to show what we're doing and why we're doing it, and it's already paying off."

Both alliance administrators said they couldn't disclose which site selectors would get an official invitation, but Simonsen said they've narrowed their list down to 12 and hope to have six on the tour in August.