

Economic development group to hold tri-county tech conference

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Area leaders are always looking for ways to diversify the economy — especially with a lingering downturn for oil and coal commodities.

The Energy Capital Economic Development Corp. is hosting a free technology conference from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday at the Gillette College Technical Education Center to focus on how the technology world affects local and regional businesses and how to improve that technology.

The event, which has been in the works for about four months, will feature 11 speakers from various backgrounds, including a variety of industry leaders from Gillette, Buffalo and Sheridan.

Phil Christopherson, the corporation's executive director, said attendees will come away with knowledge of various technology sectors, how technology — or a lack of it — can affect businesses and ideas on how to grow the area's economy.

"It's a regional effort that all started with a conversation," Christopherson said. "It's about planting ideas to expand and diversify to grow the economy. We can start doing things now like developing better broadband, infrastructure and broadening people's thinking. There are so many possibilities."

He said while the energy downturn isn't the direct reason behind the conference, it certainly brings an urgency to the need to diversify.

"Like they say, the best time to plant a tree is 10 years ago," he said at Wednesday's Energy as a Source for Economic Diversification Symposium. "The second-best time is now."

He hopes the conference will spur more ideas about how to take area businesses to another level.

"We hope that if we have a room full of people thinking about it, we'll bring forth some ideas about how the area can take advantage of technology," he said.

He highlighted Mike Wandler, who has had options to relocate his business, L&H Industrial, elsewhere, but chooses to stay in Gillette.

"He'll talk about the growth of his business and how it started as just a small, local company in town to an international business, Christopherson said.

Also scheduled to speak:

Jason Kintzler: PitchEngine founder

Justin Nelson: Entrepreneur

Brian Worthen: Mammoth Networks CEO

Aaron Sopko: Advanced Communications Technology general manager

Shawn Reese: Wyoming Business Council CEO

Sen. Dave Kinskey: R-Sheridan