



energy CAPITAL

Economic Development

345 Sinclair St.
P.O. Box 3948 Gillette, Wyoming 82717
www.EnergyCapitalED.com 307 686-2603
info@EnergyCapitalED.com

When it comes to superior Economic Development performance, the diverse, balanced and innovation driven approach of Energy Capital ED delivers.

With the help of our programs, partnerships, volunteers, and members, Energy Capital ED works successfully to advance our mission to *simulate and facilitate a diverse economy through business retention, expansion and recruitment.*

We work with and help new and existing businesses grow, expand and diversify.

Give us a call and let us help with your business expansion and relocation needs.



Employment Testing Services

3803 S. Douglas Highway, Gillette, WY
For 24 hour On-Call Assistance: 307-689-6471

Audiometric Exams & Programs • Blood Work
Drug & Alcohol Testing • EKG Testing
Employment Physicals • Functional Capacity Exams
Pulmonary Function Testing • Respirator Fit Testing
Respiratory Medical Evaluation
School Sports Physicals • Wellness Testing



The Enterprise Center was made possible through a Wyoming Business Council's Business Ready Community grant program.

Drone Photo by Phil Christopherson

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Progress Takes Planning

The idiom “good things come to those who wait” was perhaps coined to teach people the value of patience. It became so popular that Heinz ketchup even used the phrase as a marketing campaign in the 1980s.

But for Northeast Wyoming, the waiting has been filled with creating the pathways needed to bring good things here more quickly. In Campbell County, it may not have seemed that long ago when there weren't many paved roads at all. Gillette had a reputation as a boom town, a shanty town, somewhere no one really wanted to live, though many came to for work.

“Community leaders did not like that reputation, so they passed the optional 1% sales tax, and started putting in infrastructure like roads and parks,” says Phil Christopherson, CEO of Energy Capital Economic Development.

Christopherson has lived all over Wyoming, and remembers living in Gillette as a child, when the roads were red and the water was brown. He says that now, it is one of the better communities in the state, with a higher annual income, a family-centered atmosphere, and a good place to do business.

But it didn't happen overnight.

Waiting for our economy to diversify on its own has never been something that anyone thought was a good course of action. During a downturn in the 80s, many economic development organizations sprung up across the state. They weren't always successful, because – according to Christopherson – they didn't have the persistence or consistency of leadership to continue along the right path.

The average time for a major project to come to fruition is about a decade. Energy Capital Economic Development talks to at least 50 different companies a year, and so far none of them have taken Campbell County up on the offer of a well trained workforce and the foundation of a good business community. But the public doesn't really see the work that goes in, until someone finally chooses Gillette.

“Most economic development projects are like that. No one ever notices or sees them until they come to public light, and then people think ‘wow, that was quick.’ But no, it's not like that,” Christopherson says.

For one of the most successful developments in Wyoming – the Cheyenne

Continued on Page 24



The Enterprise Center building was purchased in 2016, before the local economic bust.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Progress Takes Time

Continued from Page 24

Business Parkway – it took over two decades. Land that retail giant Wal-Mart turned down in 1989 was built up from a patch of dirt to a “shovel ready” 900-acre site with roads, sewer and water lines, and the workforce to support that infrastructure. Wal-Mart reconsidered in 2005 and moved in, as well as Lowe’s, Sierra Trading Post, and Microsoft. Cheyenne now has five major business parks to foster economic growth.

Casper started working towards a similar goal years ago. Gillette – the third largest city in Wyoming behind Casper and Cheyenne – is hoping to do the same.

“To build a shovel ready park is an expensive prospect. You put a lot of money in to it, and then hope somebody comes. It may take years and years. In all that time, you’ve got all that capital tied up. So it’s hard for the private sector to do something like that.”

One of ECED’s investments – the Enterprise Center -- came courtesy of the Wyoming Business Council’s Business Ready Community grant, a program designed in 2003 to help other towns in Wyoming build sites like the Cheyenne park. The building on Sinclair Street in Gillette was purchased in 2016, shortly before an economic bust in Campbell County.

“At the time we bought it, you couldn’t find office space to lease in Gillette, things were full,” Christopherson says. “In order to recruit business to look here, we had to have a place to show them. When the downturn hit, we redirected businesses to the open spaces in the private sector.”

The question, then, was what to do with the empty office space. It has become the “Business Incubator,” a still-expanding community of shared workspaces for

Continued on Page 26

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUILDING BLOCKS

New
Business
Development

Existing
Business
Development

Entrepreneur
Development

Quality
of Life

Workforce
Development

Infrastructure
Development

Leadership, Civic Development,
& Public Policy

Energy Capital Economic Development spends nearly 90% of its time developing the top two tiers of the pyramid. Without involvement from community, state, and local organizations, as well as elected officials and leaders within the business community, the foundation (bottom two) tiers are not possible.

Insurance for your every need.

**HUB International
Mountain States Limited**

601 4J Court Unit A
Gillette, WY 82717

307-682-9397

hubinternational.com



HUB

Advocacy. Tailored Insurance Solutions. Peace of Mind.



The Enterprise Center building features a shared workspace area (left) and a board room.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Progress Takes Time

Continued from Page 24

start-up businesses and “people who’ve outgrown their garage.” It allows different entrepreneurs to network together, and brings the resources of the Wyoming Business Council, Small Business Development Center, and Energy Capital Economic Development together, in case these new business owners have questions about payroll, human resources, marketing, or anything else they may need.

“In my experience working with entrepreneurs, a lot of the time, the business doesn’t matter. It’s the mindset of the individual that’s what’s important,” says Christopherson, who has been working with ECED since 2014. “Someone with that drive will fail at one endeavor and try and find something else. If we can help them over those hurdles, they’re more likely to succeed.”

You can join the Business Incubator without being a tenant of the building. ECED is interested in building better businesses, not necessarily filling up office space. Fostering small local businesses while waiting for larger industries to re-locate here is one of the building blocks that takes up 80-90% of Christopherson’s time. Some of those “small businesses,” when allowed to grow, become international companies, like Cyclone Drilling or L&H Industrial. They, in turn, need local business to continue their success.

“We’re an industrial community, and businesses buy from other businesses. L&H does big things, but they need lots of smaller things. The mines and oil companies need these sorts of services, too.”

Working with just a two-person staff for the longest time, Energy Capital Economic Development has the support of the City of Gillette and Campbell County in the form of a willingness to keep the quality of life high and see the private sector grow. Failing to receive a boost from a quarter-cent sales tax increase last November, Economic Development was left looking for someone to run their Incubator. Without a director for the project, it was difficult to get it going the way they wanted, but the position would have to be unpaid.

“There’s a couple things that are needed to make sure everything goes forward. One of them is people. We’ve been trying to get [the Enterprise Center] going, but I’m occupied 50 hours a week, and for Mary [Melaragno, Director of Business Retention] it’s similar. We’re fully engaged. To add more things on, we need more time,” says Christopherson.

Their patience was rewarded with a very good thing when Judith Semple, the former director of the Small Business Development Center, agreed to help run the Enterprise Center in her retirement, on a

volunteer basis. She is aided by a steering committee comprised of Chamber Executive Director Gail Lofing, Chamber board members Kalina Petersen of Alignment Pros and Kevin Couch of ANB Bank, as well as John McGuire of Gillette College, Brian Worthen of Visionary Broadband, and Lori Manning of S&S Builders.

While ECED is focused on maintaining a healthy business community to attract new primary industries to Gillette, the NEW Growth Alliance is busy doing the active recruitment of those companies. Campbell County's partnership with Sheridan and Johnson counties helps guide "site selectors" – the people choosing where to relocate a company – to Northeast Wyoming. Since the smallest location most site selectors look for has a population of about 50,000 people, Campbell County can't recruit those large businesses on their own.

"They see our demographics. They are watching. They know where you're coming from if you shop in Rapid City," says Christopherson. "At some point they'll see that they can make more money by coming to Gillette, but there's not a lot we can do to get them here before then."

When Weatherby, Inc. announced they'd be moving to Sheridan, and broke ground on a new facility less than two months later, it was not the result of luck or patience. It was the product of constant hustle on the part of Sheridan's economic development organizations, and Governor Matt Mead speaking with the company himself. It was a decades-long project, and required taking a huge chance.

"Everybody looks at that and says 'Wow, that happened fast.' But the seeds of Weatherby coming to Sheridan were planted 15 years ago, when they developed the business park where Weatherby is going. They built the roads, the sewer, the water, and all the infrastructure so Weatherby could come. That never would have happened if they didn't have that business park ready to go."

"We just don't have a lot of those in this community," says Christopherson.

One possibility is taking the land past the Gillette College Agriculture & Rodeo Complex on Boxelder Road – originally earmarked for REX Carbon, LLC – and turning it in to a business park. What's uncertain is who would be the best fit for Gillette.

At its heart, it's still a coal town, in a coal community, but "diversify or die" has been written on the walls since economic development first got its footing here in 1985. Mining communities tend to not fare well in the annals of history.

"Our minerals industry is wonderful, coal is great, but when coal is gone – whether that's 5 years from now or 500 – if that's all we're depending on, then our community is in serious trouble," Christopherson says. "It's really important for us to diversify. I would like to grow advanced carbon products. Barring that, I'd like to see other manufacturers come in here and build a base."

"Good things come to those who wait" isn't the entire story. "But only the things left by those who hustle," is the second, less-often repeated part of the saying. Campbell County's hustle is just starting to gain traction.

"It took vision back then so that we could have a good community today. We need to make sure we continue with that vision, and continue helping this community grow." ↓

"It's really important for us to diversify. I would like to grow advanced carbon products. Barring that, I'd like to see other manufacturers come in here and build a base."

– Phil Christopherson
*CEO of Energy Capital
Economic Development*



Wyoming's largest maker space is an extension of Gillette College called Area 59. It will include a traditional wood shop, as well as 3D printers, computer design workstations, and a metal working area with a plasma cutter. The facility will be open to Gillette College students, K-12 students, as well as local entrepreneurs that are part of the Business Incubator.