

GGEDC Retention & Expansion Luncheon

Written by Story and Photos by Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
Friday, 18 December 2015 10:42



“It’s the first ever meeting of its kind, as far as I can discover,” proudly said Patty Lundstrom, the executive director of the Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation. “We are here (at the Hilton Garden Hotel) to recognize and celebrate the top 10 businesses in McKinley County that have had the largest impact in the region, from creating jobs to investing in other ways for the economic progress we need.”

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The noon meeting on Dec. 15 sparked a lively round of conversation during and after the meal, as these business people shared their concerns and accomplishments with others of the same mind. At the top of the concerns was a need to vastly improve the skill sets of the existing work force, through the use of available and developing programs at UNM-G.

“Their focus seems to be on social work now,” said one participant. “Not that social work is unimportant, but efforts need to be advanced for work force education in businesses. Counseling services for employees should be available, efforts made to diminish the alcohol problem and the disastrous side effects it causes. And of course, comparable incentives for businesses to relocate to this area, such as taxes, rent, etc.”

Retention of these employers is equally as important as bringing in new business, and that fact was certainly not left out during this luncheon and in the following discussions. Without retention, expansion becomes a vicious circle of never-ending attempts to keep every business in the air at the same time. If one falls, another of equal or better needs to fill the gap immediately. These current employers list over 1,800 full time employees and also use the services of over 750 contractors to help in their businesses.

Much remains to be done in both areas, retention and expansion, and there is no quick fixes. The demand in any economic development is not merely to entice the next Red Lobster to town, but to build a more sustainable environment that will provide for the area’s needs in the long term. That includes the ability to transport goods to other locations, and in that respect Gallup is in a good position. We are not only on one of the busiest coast-to-coast interstates but also have an advantage with rail lines that provide easier access to other points throughout North America.

Transportation has always been an important factor in the development of any larger business; foodstuffs grown miles away are used in restaurants and kitchens around the world; artwork developed in one place must be shipped to consumers in close-by or distant markets; and for sheer enjoyment, visitors will almost always choose more accessible places to visit, even if they eventually want to rough it for relaxation.

It is important to note that GGEDC also uses the services of an advisory committee to assist them in planning the next stages of development. In this case, those advisors come from the BNSF Railway, Continental Divide Electric Cooperative, Inc., and Gallup Land Partners, who recently purchased some 26,000 acres of land that had been mostly unused, from Gamercoco.

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Civic leaders also play an important role in economic development, as recognized during the luncheon introductions. Mayor Jackie McKinney and three of his four council people were present, as was one County Commissioner Tony Tanner and County Manager Bill Lee.

Continued efforts by these businesses and their leaders, along with civic responsibility and encouragement to other necessary facilities – schools, medical providers, etc. - will provide Gallup-McKinley with more life of an improved nature in the future.