

# Why Sheridan is and is not desirable to businesses

Weakness, challenge or opportunity for improvement?

Whatever you call it, it's the same thing — a reason a business may fail or not choose to base itself in Sheridan.

Over the past few weeks, Forward Sheridan and residents in the Sheridan area on the Strategic Planning Task Force have examined both the reasons Sheridan is desirable to businesses and the reasons it isn't.

Some of the challenges are obvious: airline service, lack of affordable housing, declining work force and an aging population. What hasn't been obvious is how one affects the other.

While the traditional approach to economic development has been to create more jobs, we found that, in Sheridan County, the jobs are here. What's missing are the workers to fill them.

So "work force recruitment" is one of the issues we're dealing with.

That challenge is directly tied to two other issues we've identified: the lack of housing and lack of child-care facilities.

If you can attract more families of working age to the community, where are they going to live? And can both parents work if they can't find someone to care for their young children?

Other challenges include problems with city and county zoning and planning procedures, an overall lack of design plan-

ning, a shortage of career/technical education that prepares young people for the needs of today's businesses, the limited number of event/convention facilities, a lack — either real or perceived — of communications between city and county officials, and drug/substance abuse in the workplace.

Now through the leadership of Forward Sheridan, the county's economic development organization, we're building a road map for Sheridan's economic vitality.

We have identified why and how these issues can hinder business in the Sheridan area.

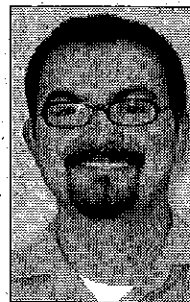
We have explored potential solutions. And we have identified the key "players" — the government entities, organizations and business groups — who have a role in implementing the solutions.

An obvious player in work force housing, for example, is the Sheridan Housing Action Committee. But others that must be, and in some instances already are, involved include Habitat for Humanity of the Eastern Big Horns, city and county

## A Community Affair

Jesus Rios

*Planning for Sheridan's economic development*



governments, the lending institutions, and the developers who are planning subdivisions and building the houses.

Efforts are already under way to turn some of these challenges into strengths. A separate citizens' task force is at work on the airline service issue, for

example, and Friday, Great Lakes began service alongside Big Sky at Sheridan County Airport.

For the first time in more than a decade, Sheridan County (and Johnson County) will be served by two airline companies.

Thanks in part to the Childcare Coalition, the city of Sheridan, Sheridan County School District 2 and Sheridan College have applied for a \$3 million grant that would fund construction of a child-care facility geared toward providing 24/7 child-care access for parents working nontypical hours, including holidays.

A facility alone will not resolve all child-care issues. What about trained staff?

Part of the solution is a program being developed through Sheridan College to

train and certify child-care workers. The program will benefit the proposed facility as well as other providers in the community.

The ball is rolling.

The community has discussed several of these challenges in many forums and many venues. And now, with Forward Sheridan as the catalyst, action is being taken to turn our opportunities for improvement into realized success in economic development.

*Editor's note: "A Community Affair" is a weekly column from citizens who support Forward Sheridan, a professional business organization of invested partners whose purpose is to develop and maintain a sound economy in Sheridan County. Philippe Chino is president/CEO of Forward Sheridan.*

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