

# Child care seen as need for economic development

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Child care as a critical component of economic development?

Sheridan County business owners answer that question with a resounding yes.

Owners and businesses who responded to a survey last summer say as many as 400 jobs in the county are going unfilled because parents have no place to leave their children while they work.

This isn't a reflection on the quality of existing child-care providers. The county's existing providers earn praise for the skills and the quality child care they provide.

But there aren't enough of them.

At a Sheridan City Council meeting in April, Tim Green, vice president/general manager of Advanced Communications Technology in Sheridan, said 24 percent of adults of working age (18 to 65) in Sheridan County are unavailable for work because they can't find child care.

The county's existing child-care providers are caring for all the children they can accommodate, given space and staffing restrictions, and have long lists of parents waiting for a vacancy so they can enroll their children for care.

Added to that, the county's existing child-care providers do well in accommodating parents of standard 8-to-5 weekday jobs, but provisions for parents

who must work early in the mornings, late at night, on weekends or on holidays are lacking in the community.

Green told the City Council last month that lack of child care is contributing to a lack of work force and interrupted work. Parents must take time off

from jobs because they cannot find a safe place to leave their children on weekends and holidays.

In some "extreme cases," Green said, ACT has accommodated parents bringing their children to work. But that's also disruptive to co-workers and customers.

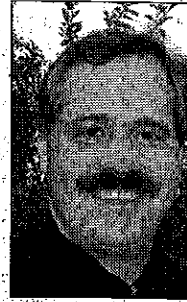
Adding to the problem for parents is that we live in a time when, with very few exceptions, both parents must work to contribute to the family's income.

That can be especially true in communities like Sheridan where housing prices, especially, are high, but it's a problem across the United States.

An article in the April edition of Ladies Home Journal cited research that found a family's earnings are reduced by almost 37 percent if a woman takes

## A Community Affair

Mark  
Englert



Planning for Sheridan's economic development

just three years off her job.

The city of Sheridan in March applied for a \$3 million grant from the Wyoming Business Council's Business-Ready Communities program to build a facility that ultimately would care for children from

infancy up, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The facility would be administered by a joint powers board appointed by the city, Sheridan County School District 2 and Sheridan College, which are also involved in the planning.

Also involved is the Child Care Coalition, assisted by Forward Sheridan, the county's economic development organization.

Some child-care providers have expressed concerns that the new facility would put them out of business — but that shouldn't necessarily be a concern, according to Jay McGinnis, executive director of the Sheridan YMCA, which operates its own child-care center and after-school programs.

"If the facility was funded and built

today," McGinnis told the council in April, "it would capture 9 percent of the unmet need" in Sheridan County.

No one expects the new facility to solve all of the county's child-care capacity problems, but it's a start.

Sheridan County business owners say if the county is to fulfill its goal of helping more parents return to the work force, adding child-care capacity, through the addition of such a facility, is an essential step.

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*He has been engaged in issues of child care and economic and work force development for several years serving as a member of the Sheridan Area Child Care Task Force, North Central Wyoming Workforce Partnership, and the board of directors of the Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce.*

*"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.*