

# Economic development is about people first

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Economic development is about people first.

When you think about "economic development," you probably think about recruiting new companies for new jobs, incentives to attract new companies, sprawl, etc.

Economic development in the Sheridan community is about local business owners who want their businesses to thrive, it's about local workers who want to work, and it's about meeting the needs of everyone who wants to live and work and raise a family in Sheridan County.

Meeting those needs, helping businesses grow and prosper and creating conditions in which people can earn the money they need are reasons Forward Sheridan exists.

But the task is too big, and too important, for Forward Sheridan to do alone. Successful economic development isn't created by a handful of people at the top and "presented" to the community.

Successful economic development is created by the community, and that's all of us, from business owners to their employees to the retirees to the young workers and the children growing up and attending schools here.

Forward Sheridan has taken what many might consider a very nontraditional approach to economic develop-

ment. We ask for help from the community.

For months, we have relied on task forces of citizen volunteers, community residents — your co-workers and neighbors — to look at our community's economic development challenges and what can be done to overcome them.

It's the efforts of those volunteers that have already led to a second air service at the Sheridan County Airport and the prospect of having eventually a new child-care facility in Sheridan — a facility that will not compete with existing child-care providers but will meet the presently unmet needs of a 24-hour facility that's open on weekends and holidays.

It would also alleviate the problems of parents who are now on waiting lists because the existing day-care facilities are maxed out on the number of children they can accommodate.

Volunteer members of an Economic Development Strategic Planning task force are addressing our economic development challenges ranging from work force shortage, lack of work force hous-

## A Community Affair

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Planning for Sheridan's economic development



ing, lack of child care, drug and substance abuse in the workplace, limited indoor events and convention facilities, and careers for younger workers, and are developing proposed solutions to these challenges and identifying the various organizations in the community whose help will be needed.

This approach to economic development demands that we think outside the box of tradition. For example, one traditional approach to economic development has been to develop business parks and look for large industries to attract to a community.

It's true, a business park is being developed at Sheridan County Airport, but that's only one facet in the overall economic development picture. The park is keeping companies here in Sheridan.

And Sheridan County doesn't need to bring in any large businesses employing hundreds of people. Sheridan County needs the workers to fill the jobs that are already here.

That's why the focus of the citizens' task force has been on providing housing that working people can afford and day

care that can meet the needs of parents who work shifts and must work on weekends and holidays.

In a survey last summer, Sheridan County businesses estimated as many as 400 people of working age could enter the work force if they could find someone to care for their children while they're at work.

And probably every businessperson in Sheridan knows either firsthand or from experience of others about employees who accept a job, then resign a short time later because they cannot find a house or apartment they can afford.

Successful economic development is to find solutions by implementing strategies to overcome these challenges that face our special community. It is an ongoing process.

If economic development must continue to succeed in our community, it must always be what the community needs and wants it to be.

*"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.*

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