

Meeting the needs for more young professionals

Young professionals (ages 21-40) are a vital component in communities, because they introduce new ideas and keep town life energetic.

Sheridan has a proportionally low amount of this demographic represented in its population.

Forward Sheridan and participants on the Forward Sheridan Strategic Planning Task Force have examined this issue and determined that there are two challenges posed in Sheridan: 1) recruiting young professional workers to the area and 2) retaining them once they get here.

The task force came up with what the Sheridan area needs to increase its population of young professional workers. It was suggested that we need more affordable and quality housing, child care, activities (other than barhopping), and an increased variety of dining options (sushi, Thai, Indian, etc.).

Some of the solutions that we came up with would not only be attractive to young professionals, but would also benefit the community as a whole.

Some initiatives that would enhance Sheridan include creating another folk (disc golf) course, bringing more live music and dancing opportunities to town, and keeping downtown businesses open past 5 p.m.

It would also be nice to enhance dining experiences by providing more outdoor seating.

If the Sheridan area can be enhanced

just a little bit, I think it can be very successful in recruiting and retaining young professional workers. This is because Sheridan already has a base of many amenities that are appealing to this group.

As a young professional myself, I initially found this area very attractive as a place to start a career. Previous to coming to Sheridan, I job-searched in Laramie, Boulder, Colo., and Austin, Texas.

In terms of entertainment, these places have plenty to offer; however, in terms of career opportunities, Sheridan might have more to offer than either of those places.

All of the other towns, which are full of young people, are not full of opportunities, because they are saturated with educated, qualified individuals who are all competing for the small number of jobs that are available.

While spending time in each of these places, I met a plethora of people with advanced degrees who had resorted to waiting tables because they were either unemployed in their field or underemployed.

In Sheridan, if you are willing, there

A Community Affair

Elizabeth
Wood

Planning for Sheridan's economic development



are more than enough employment opportunities in a variety of sectors.

Aside from the career opportunities, Sheridan is attractive to young professionals because of the ample outdoor opportunities available here or within

a few hours.

Sheridan is also attractive because you don't have to deal with the traffic that plagues larger communities. In fact, if you live in the city of Sheridan, you don't even need a car to get around, because almost everything downtown is within walking distance.

Many other professionals are environmentally conscious and desire to limit their gas consumption as much as possible and therefore find Sheridan appealing.

By building on this strong base and following up with new initiatives, I believe Sheridan can more than double its number of young professionals within two years.

To tackle this challenge, Liz Dearcorn from Forward Sheridan and I are teaming up to create a Task Force for Young Professionals.

During these meetings we will officially recruit a task force to help deal with issues in this area, assign committee chairs and discuss any new ideas and options.

If you are interested in knowing about future meetings or more about what the 21-40 age group is planning, please contact Liz Dearcorn at liz@forwardsheridan.com.

Elizabeth Wood grew up in Hagerstown, Md., and graduated from Salisbury University with a bachelor's degree in political science.

During this time she completed multiple political internships including working for a U.S. senator in Washington, D.C., the Texas governor in Austin, and the Wyoming Legislature in Cheyenne.

She then received a master's degree in geography from the University of Wyoming and currently serves as associate city planner for the city of Sheridan.

"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.