

Setting goals for Sisters' economy

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The Economic Development of Central Oregon (EDCO) Sisters Advisory Board is meeting on a regular basis with Caprielle Foote-Lewis, the Sisters EDCO manager, to establish specific goals, monitor efforts to recruit new traded-sector businesses to Sisters, and encourage internship opportunities for students from COCC, OSU-Cascades and the University of Oregon.

Greg Willitts, general manager of FivePine Lodge and Conference Center, reported on the successful employment of an OSU-Cascades intern from the hospitality program who worked for 120 hours at FivePine. Willitts was so impressed with her abilities and the contributions she made, he is hoping to hire her at some point.

“Having an intern allows a business to get a perspective on millennials, and they provide us with a fresh perspective on our business,” he said. “She provided us with a stellar report. She loved doing projects like crunching numbers on our food costs and cleaning costs, providing accurate information for us to use.”

Roger Lee, EDCO executive director, concurred with Willitts' assessment.

“Interns add so much value and do things faster, especially anything to do with technology.”

Lee reported that the Redmond and Bend programs have full-time internship coordinators and Madras has a part-time coordinator.

“The emerging workforce needs job experience and the program adds value for the businesses,” Lee said.

He said in some places in the country, chambers of commerce facilitate the internship programs as well as serving as the economic development office.

The Sisters EDCO

Strategic Plan 2018-2020 outlines four goals for economic development and multiple objectives and detailed actions to achieve the goals.

One goal is to move to the Sisters area 10 new companies that will create 100 new, well-paying jobs and invest \$8 million in new capital investment by the end of 2020. This will include the targeting of marketing and recruitment efforts geographically and by industry for greatest effectiveness.

Another goal is to facilitate the start of eight local, scaleable, early-stage companies as the next generation of employers and jobs. The idea would be to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem to generate at least 50 jobs from those startups, and help them raise \$4 million in growth capital by the end of 2020.

Also by the end of 2020, EDCO will help grow 10 local traded-sector employers with a robust Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program that catalyzes \$8 million in new capital investment and 100 new, well-paying jobs.

The fourth goal is to work with private and public partners to catalyze development of at least 30,000 square feet of new light-industrial space in Sisters to help both new and existing companies.

There are five local program initiatives for 2018-2020: improve EDCO and local program

communication to partners, stakeholders, and community; raise \$5,000 in private-sector donations to local programs; hold an annual business luncheon and tour event; assist with local internship program coordination; and encourage use of the Sisters Country brand on Sisters-made products.

Lee spoke about the need to create jobs because people want to come here to live, and there needs to be work for them to do. He said a lesson learned from other areas of the country is the importance of business diversification.

“We need to not put all our eggs in one basket,” he said.

By diversifying, the local economy is better protected from a downturn in one business sector.

The Bend Venture Conference is scheduled for October 19-20, at the Tower Theater. The conference connects social impact, early stage, and growth stage companies with investment opportunities. It is the largest Angel Conference in the West. The premier regional event attracts more than 450 top entrepreneurs, investors, and business leaders who, in 2016, awarded nearly \$4 million in investments, awards and prizes to 10 companies. Advanced registration is available online at eventbrite.com or through the EDCO website, <https://edcoinfo.com>.

Prescribed burns are in the forecast

Fire managers with the Sisters Ranger District plan to take advantage of recent rainfall and start working on prescribed burn projects as early as next week.

Ignitions are planned to occur when forest fuel moisture and weather conditions permit.

“We realize most people are just now breathing a sigh of relief that fire season is winding down,” fuels specialist Jinny Reed reported. “Fall-like environmental conditions often provide an ideal opportunity to reduce hazardous fuels while improving forest health during a time of our choosing, rather than waiting for a lightning strike or an escaped campfire to burn hazardous fuels during the summer months.”

According to fire managers, objectives for prescribed burns are to improve wildlife habitat, riparian habitat, and to reduce hazardous amounts of forest vegetation.

“Prescribed burning is a proactive Forest Service approach to fire management,

reintroducing fire in a planned, low-intensity fire behavior atmosphere which benefits ecological resources, instead of waiting for an unplanned ignition, such as lightning, to start a wildfire often requiring an expensive suppression response and can burn with destructive fire behavior,” Reed stated.

“Fall-like environmental conditions often provide an ideal opportunity to reduce hazardous fuels while improving forest health...”
— Jinny Reed

The Forest Service says they appreciate public tolerance of short-duration low-particulate smoke impacts in support of forest restoration goals, utilizing prescribed fire as a restoration tool.



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