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'Jazzy program'

# City hopes polyglot team will boost local economy

By Marian Green  
Of the Emerald

Eugene's ready to go to bat for economic development with its new Business Assistance Team, a creation of the city of Eugene and the Eugene Chamber of Commerce.

The team is composed of 12 members, four each from the city, the Chamber of Commerce, the University and Lane Community College, says Team Manager Cindy Briner, one of the four city employees "on loan" for the team's initial six-month duration.

Economics professor Ed Whitelaw, business professor Del Hawkins and journalism professor Bill Winter are team members from the University.

"The whole idea (of the team) is so you don't have 26 different groups working at once with no coordination," Briner says.

Students and business-persons also will volunteer their time on special projects.

Other cities with "jazzy economic programs," such as Philadelphia, San Antonio and Atlanta, have used the team concept successfully, she says.

Briner says the team could become permanent after six months are up because the team "is not going to change the economy in six months."

Its goals include developing a coordinated information program about Eugene and industrial/businesses sites, providing assistance referral for local businesses, attracting new businesses and improving the city's business image.

"First we are going to help businesses who are already here, and then we are going to try to make Eugene more widely known," she says. "A lot of people have this image that Eugene is anti-business, but they've never been here to see what we do have."

The team plans to advertise the city's amenities in national magazines such as Business Week, she says. They also will respond to critical articles on Eugene in Newsweek, the Los Angeles Times and the San Francisco Chronicle by providing objective information on the city, she adds.

"I don't think we want to be in a defensive position," says Briner. "We just want to be an information source."

The team members' varied backgrounds will help develop "a network around the country" to spread information about Eugene.

"Everybody has contacts," she says of the team. "Collectively, we represent a good portion of

the United States."

University business students are working with team member and business professor Del Hawkins to "stratify" the Eugene market, she adds.

Their results should yield a report, similar to the Fantus Co. report conducted for the Lane Economic Foundation, Briner says. It will detail the fastest growing industries and those most suitable for Eugene.

"From that, we'll get a target of industries to go after," she says.

The team, which began operations in late April, already has had tremendous community response. "The phone's been ringing off the hook," says Briner.

Most of the questions deal with how to start a business or where to get the funding, she says.

The team will use a "personalized" approach in helping clients wade through the bureaucratic red tape, she says.

"A lot of regulation that seems to be anti-business also can promote business," she says. Nevertheless, the team will scrutinize all the rules and regulations to see if some can be "streamlined," she adds.

"That's not going to be an overnight project."

One recent client had no problem getting her small business started after contracting the team.

A woman called Briner, asked how she could start a pet sitting/house watching business and got her first customer - Briner. The Briners who were wondering who would care for their cat and two dogs when they go to the World's Fair this summer, got their answer.

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