

IVCRT Insights

By RON PHILLIPS

As everyone is aware, our local economy is not doing very well. The last 14 months have seen the departure of Fire Mt. Gems, Energy Outfitters, and Krauss Craft to the I-5 corridor. Now with Rough & Ready facing the possibility of closure, another 140 jobs are on the line.

The new priority for the CRT is economic development and job creation. In addition to its other activities in this field (the Revolving Loan Fund, helping R&R employees explore the ESOP option, marketing of wood product businesses, exploring federal contracting for forestry work), the CRT is seriously considering a major investment in the tourism sector. Tourism - though not a panacea to our economic ills - does offer opportunities to support local businesses and create jobs.

This would take the form of a multi-functional facility designed to increase curb appeal to stop more travelers and better link the Oregon Caves National Monument to the rest of Illinois Valley. The proposed center will serve as a catalyst for entrepreneurial development by providing a focal point where business owners, crafters, artists, and service providers can interact and collaborate.

The center will serve as the intersection of Internet and on-site marketing for area products. The goal is to build a critical mass of commercial activity based on existing export products (furniture, arts and crafts, wine) and tourism services (accommodation, dining, attractions) within a supportive environment (rental space, administrative services, training, and technical assistance) to spawn new businesses (web design/maintenance, product photography, shipping) that will encourage further growth.

The center will be a multi-functional facility combining a number of elements: Gallery and showroom for furniture, arts/crafts products, and Oregon Caves souvenirs; demonstration studios where artisans can practice their crafts to regale visitors; small business incubator with rental space and affordable administrative services; community connectivity area with high speed computer access buttressed by technical support; and training facility for micro-enterprise organizations and Rogue Community College to deliver courses and workshops.

In addition to the center, the CRT is applying for a Rural Business Opportunities Grant which would provide funds so that qualifying businesses and start-ups could establish a "Business Investment Account." These funds - when matched with the business owner's own money - can be used to purchase whatever services (business planning, technical consultation, Website design, training, etc.) that would best help that business grow. The goal would be to assist businesses to acquire services needed to access loans and/or to solve pressing business problems.

If you would like to get involved in development, please contact the CRT office. If you own or would like to own a business, visit ivcrt.org for the business survey.

Forestry Contracting Workshop, Feb. 8 - 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

If you are interested in finding out more about federal contracting for restoration, thinning and other work in the public forests and defensible space on private land, the Family Resource Center is the place to be.

Beware of phone scam says OSP

Oregon State Police (OSP) recently announced that a fictitious organization is soliciting money by phoning residents and identifying themselves as being associated with the OSP.

It's reported that this group states on the phone that the money is being sought due to the recent failure of Measure 28.

OSP noted in a news release that it does not solicit funds from the public and is not involved in this endeavor.

These actions constitute a criminal act and it is requested that any information pertaining to the subjects identity be reported to the OSP.

JoCo. office seeks volunteer

The Josephine County Sheriff's Office is seeking a new volunteer to take the place of Dave Abbey, who was with the office for 7 years. Anyone interested can contact Deputy Rich McMillen at the sheriff's office.

ODA initiates new marketing program

Signs of hope for Oregon agriculture during 2002 are seen by Phil Ward, the director of the Oregon Dept. of Agriculture (ODA).

He sees 2003 as a critical year for the state agency and the agriculture industry in general, with economic viability of producers the principal desired outcome.

"You can call this a prediction if you want, but I believe we are going to see our export markets continue to strengthen in 2003, and the softening value of the U.S. dollar will provide us more access to the international marketplace," he said.

Ward's optimism is tempered with the reality of statistics which show net farm income this past year at a relatively low point.

Even though Oregon's value of agricultural production stands at \$3.5 billion, low commodity prices, high expenses, and other economic factors are keeping the farmer and rancher from making a substantial profit. Oregon's agricultural diversity allows some sectors to do well, but many others are still struggling.

That makes the ODA focus on helping the industry remain economically viable.

Ward said that ODA is initiating some relatively new services that will help give Oregon agricultural products a leg up in a competitive marketplace, beginning with a branded marketing effort, the Oregon Advantage Program.

Through the program, ODA provides certification to Oregon firms with products that meet certain quality standards, processing standards, and handling standards that assure food safety, Ward said.

National retailers and international markets are asking for such certification from those who produce and handle agricultural products.

ODA also is looking at its regulatory programs as service to the agriculture community, meaning that regulation supports the industry's high standards for production and marketing by keeping the playing

field honest for all producers.

While the agency has a number of programs that directly assist the agriculture community, it can also play an advocacy role on key issues where it does not have direct responsibility. Protection of farm land and labor issues are two examples.

Potential legislation in the 2003 session is expected to include agricultural labor. Ward said he sees the issue as another critical component to the industry's survival.

"We understand there might be some interest in adopting a collective bargaining act for agriculture in Oregon," he said.

"That is something that deserves a careful look and could have benefits for both the farm worker and the farm community," he continued. "ODA wants to make sure it can assist in the deliberation and fact finding process relative to these kinds of issues."

\$ WANTED: Local Entrepreneurs \$
To utilize Low Interest Business Loans
 Pick up an application & information at:

- IVCRT Office, 200-C Lister St.
- I.V. Library, 209 W. Palmer
- IV Family Coalition, 535 E. River St.
- Selma Video (next to Selma Post Office)
- O'Brien Country Store

Deadline for applications: Feb. 21
 Illinois Valley Community Response Team

520 S. Redwood Hwy
 541-592-3918

Blue Marlin Inn

Valentine's Day Special

Prime Rib... \$10.95
(with prawns, oysters or scallops...\$14.95)
 Prime Rib with Lobster... \$17.95
 Lobster Platter... \$16.95
 Reservations Recommended
 Served from 2 p.m. to closing
 Tuesday-Sunday: 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
 (Closed Monday)



Hog Wild Sale!

Thursday & Friday

Feb. 6 and 7



- Assorted Loin Pork Chops ... \$1.27 lb.
- Pork Half Loins ... \$1.47 lb.
- Boneless Pork Chops ... \$1.87 lb.
- Pork Shoulder Roast99 lb.
- Pork Steaks ... \$1.27 lb.
- Country Style Spareribs ... \$1.27 lb.
- Baby Back Ribs ... \$3.47 lb.
- Western Family Bacon 16 oz. ... \$1.89 ea.

Shop Smart

FOOD WAREHOUSE

205 Watkins St., Cave Junction 592-3333 Bakery & Deli 592-6898