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Planning is What Separates Economic Development from Runaway Growth

By Linda McArthur, Administrator for the New Mexico Economic Development Course

Growth and development aren't the same thing — and many communities have learned the hard way that attracting new industries and businesses to an area doesn't automatically translate into more jobs and a higher standard of living.

Cities and towns eager to recruit businesses often overlook the invariable population growth that accompanies job growth, and some don't anticipate the increased pressures on public services and infrastructure. As a consequence, many communities are forced to spend money they don't have to expand services and then to raise taxes on residents to cover the costs.

Growth without planning forces a community to lurch from one crisis to another. But development approaches population growth and increased business opportunities as part of a well-thought out plan that considers all aspects of such dramatic change.

Training matters

A community can prepare for development — rather than just reacting to growth — by training the people who play important roles in planning and directing the community's economic development. That training can be found in a one-week economic development “boot camp” hosted by Western New Mexico University each year since 1993 in Silver City.

The pace of the New Mexico Economic Development Course is fast, the flood of information furious and the curriculum broad. “Graduates” have a broad understanding of economic development, a network of economic development professionals to call on when forming a local economic development team and a basic understanding of existing resources.

The course begins May 23 on the WNMU campus. The university presents the course in cooperation with the New Mexico Small Business Development Center Network, the New Mexico Economic Development Department and New Mexico IDEA.

Mustering up

A typical day at the boot camp begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 7 or 8 p.m., with breakfast, lunch and dinner on site or as part of a field trip. The long days are necessary, as the course covers about 18

subjects ranging from business retention and expansion and funding economic development projects to international business opportunities.

WNMU President John Counts and Mrs. Barbara Counts welcome participants with a reception Sunday evening at the home of Vice President Linda Kay Jones. The week's events include dinner at the Buckhorn Saloon and Opera House and visits to Syzygy Tile, the Freeport-McMoRan mine and the Silver City Museum. Attendees will tour the city's historic downtown and hear about Silver City's Main Street Project.

During the course, participants will receive everything they need to establish an economic development organization, develop an economic development plan and timetable and implement the plan effectively.

The course, including meals, costs \$650 for New Mexico residents. For \$120 more, students can stay in a dorm on campus, and university credit is available for an additional \$150. Full and partial scholarships are available for representatives of towns that can't afford the price of admission.

Call the SBDC office at 538-6320 or email mcarthur@wnmu.edu for more information. Check the Web at www.nmsbdc.com/silvercity/index.html to see the brochure.

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