

PUBLISHED: November 2017

Economic Development – Why do we need it?

Economic development is one of those hard to understand concepts, especially in a small county/community. Many don't understand what we do and others just feel like it's a waste of time and money. Sometimes I feel that way too. Let me explain.

Economic development focuses on strengthening the economy. We work with existing businesses on issues which affect them. We work with entrepreneurs who want to realize the American dream. And finally, we seek out new business to support the local workforce.

I've been doing this type of work for 19 years in Iowa counties smaller than Jefferson County, Kansas. Does this make me an expert? No. But what I do know, is that counties and communities who put their blood, sweat and tears into making their communities better, WIN!

The struggles are the same everywhere and we all deal with the same problems, such as dilapidated housing, lack of local support for our small businesses, and local jobs. Jefferson County is not unique, and as I delve into the life-blood of your communities and the county, we will work together to come up with solutions to work towards a better way of life.

I need partners in this process, a team, people who are willing to "grow" their communities, people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and people who can think outside the box. I want a conversation with you! What can we do together that we cannot do alone?

If we don't start planning for the future, none of this is going to change. It takes time to build something special and I believe that Jefferson County has that "something special". When we get comfortable with our surroundings we do not notice the benefits of living in smaller communities. We may work in a larger community. We probably shop there before coming home from work. What does that do to our local economy? I know it's cheaper to shop in the Big Box stores, I do it too, but the benefit of making a conscience decision to spend at least some of our hard-earned paycheck locally is important.

How many of you shop online? Never having to leave your comfy couch or your jammies, to do Christmas shopping. Yes, we are going to keep seeing an increase in the amount of online shopping, just like we saw our small community main streets die when the Big Box stores opened. Now the Big Box stores are being affected by consumers shopping online.

In order for the pendulum to swing back to creating active "main streets" we must become part of the solution. We must start supporting our local business people. What are you willing to do as a consumer? Business owners: what can you do to provide an "experience" for shoppers?

I believe we can all play a part in bringing life back to our communities. With a little hard work and a commitment for success we can all WIN!