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CCEDC, COUNTY ENTITIES CELEBRATE DECADE OF GRANT WORK

Economic development leaders work with other county agencies to leverage grant funds

WYNNE – For the last 10 years, the Cross County Economic Development Corp. has worked with other local organizations to bring nearly \$5.25 million in grant funds back to Cross County.

Grants are primarily money, from public or private sources, received one time by an entity to be used for a specified purpose during a specific time frame.

Several local companies have been the beneficiaries of grants, leveraged through the assistance of the CCEDC partnering with other organizations. Those companies include Mueller Industries, Eakas Arkansas and Addison Shoe Co.

“We have been able to help these companies obtain grants from regional, state and federal sources,” said Aaron Stewart, CCEDC executive director. “In some cases, we put actual incentive money into a project or program that allowed one of the companies to then receive matching funds from other sources or we assisted by working with the granting agencies to show why the grant funds were needed in Cross County.”

One of the most recent cases of the CCEDC providing actual matching funds came earlier this year, when Addison Shoe Co. received an \$11,000 incentive to offset costs associated with a new pilot energy savings program through Entergy Arkansas, who matched the CCEDC’s offering. The program will help Addison’s employees participate in a loan program to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. The company,

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following the support of the CCEDC and Entergy, has been able to successfully pursue efforts to receive more than \$2 million in grant money to help duplicate the program in other areas of the state.

The CCEDC has also worked with Village Creek State Park and the Resort at Village Creek, a state-of-the-art golf course and resort that recently opened its initial 18 holes of championship golf.

“We are in the process of working with the Cross County Rural Water System on a grant for an 8-inch waterline extension that will benefit the golf course and the residents along Highway 284 east,” said Stewart. “This will provide better water capacity to the area around the golf course and resort. Local residents will benefit and it will help any future companies that open in the area as well.”

The golf resort waterline extension project is not the first involving the CCEDC and a water utility. In 2005, the CCEDC worked with Wynne Water Utilities to help obtain state and federal grant funds to improve the water capacity in the southern portion of Wynne. A \$900,000 water tower was built to help support the water capacity needed by Eakas Arkansas and future industries that could locate in the area. Stewart said that the foresight by Wynne Water Utilities, the city of Wynne and the leadership of both has allowed the CCEDC to be more competitive in trying to attract new business.

“We are now able to position ourselves more favorably because of the excess water capacity provided through the water tower south of Wynne,” said Stewart. “Some companies need tremendous amounts of water and without that particular investment in Cross County we would not be nearly as competitive.”

Don O’Neal, general manager of Wynne Water Utilities, echoed Stewart’s sentiments adding that the water tower and other upgrades have positioned Cross County well for future growth.

“Growth follows utilities, that is a given,” said O’Neal. “In my association with other communities and economic development, the Wynne operation which included relationships between so many factions made it more conducive to the success of attracting industries.”

O’Neal said that industries don’t just locate into a region. He said that it takes the cooperation of many groups and that having the CCEDC in Cross County is a plus.

“Industries are not coming here because it’s a nice spot in the road,” he said. “Now that may have something to do with it, but it is a lot of other factors. Utilities are a big part of

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it. Also, if you don't have trained leadership in place, these industries are not sure who to deal with and that makes it harder (to attract them). It's more burdensome. The ability of a fixed base operation, knowing who to talk to in order to satisfy needs of the moment is important. It takes a lot of cooperation from a lot of people."

Stewart said his office will continue to pursue grant opportunities, cooperating with local organizations, to bring money back to Cross County.

"We will always work hard to support our local businesses and industries," he said. "We have tried to utilize our incentive funds wisely and, in many cases, we're able to pursue grant funding opportunities that would have no otherwise been possible without the generosity of Cross County residents in 1999."

Cross County became the first county in Arkansas, in 1999, to pass a sales tax dedicated to economic growth. The 1-cent measure lasted for three years and ended in 2002. The CCEDC has operated nearly eight years without additional funds. County voters will decide on a similar measure during a special countywide election on Tuesday, Sept. 8.