

City of Scottsbluff earns recertification designation

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The city of Scottsbluff was recognized Monday after the city earned its recertification in the Nebraska Economic Development Certified Community Program.

The city of Scottsbluff was originally certified in April 2007 and recertified in October 2010 and November 2015. The recertification designation will continue through 2020.

Sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and administered by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the program views Scottsbluff as a city that is ready for business growth and prepared to meet the needs of potential businesses who wish to locate their companies in the area.

In a press release from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, Nebraska Diplomats President Dean Hart said the city of Scottsbluff understands and appreciates the value of partnership in creating, sustaining and growing the quality of life for their citizens, not only city-wide, but throughout the greater region.

Only 36 cities in the state have this designation, said Starr Lehl, business development consultant for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

“A lot of grants have been given to the city because you are certified,” Lehl said.

Among those grants was a \$350,000 Community Development Block Grant for downtown revitalization, which rehabbed 48 downtown businesses, added a public restroom and erected permanent awnings in the farmers market area. Stoplights were also removed and Broadway was repaved.

“Your downtown is really something,” Lehl said. “When people come in, they see how well you put the funds to good use.”

In the past five years, the city of Scottsbluff has helped several new businesses locate in the valley and helped an existing business expand. Those efforts have created 481 new jobs.

Also in those five years, the Western Nebraska Economic Development Board was created to further regional economic development in the Panhandle.

As part of the regional economic development plan, the Twin Cities Development Association renovated a 9,000-square-foot office in downtown Scottsbluff for the Panhandle Area Development District, TCD and Scottsbluff Business Masterminds. There is space available for nine offices and 12 cubicles to support entrepreneurs and start-up businesses.

The city of Scottsbluff was also recognized for the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to support private development projects, including the Fairfield Inn and Suites and Elite Health Medical and Wellness Center. The combined investment of all TIF projects is an estimated \$31.45 million and added more than 200 employees.

LB 840 funds have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars for new businesses such as the Fusion Ranch, a California company that processes Asian- and American-style beef jerky products that are shipped throughout the U.S. and Canada. Fusion Ranch provided 62 full-time employees.

Councilman Raymond Gonzales thanked Lehl on behalf of the city for all the help she has provided over the past five years.

With the recognition, the city of Scottsbluff will continue to be able to pursue funding for more economic development to improve the city. Lehl said other cities throughout the state are looking to Scottsbluff as an example.

“You’re a catalyst for the rest of the state,” she said. “They look to you a lot.”