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**PREPARING FOR THE UPTURN
DURING THE DOWNTURN
Southern Idaho “Style”**

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National and local economies have taken a serious hit lately. O.K.....admittedly, this isn't earth-shattering news.

But what might be interesting “new” news, is how southern Idaho's rural region is tackling the downturn head-on utilizing several new tactics while standing on a solid economic development foundation constructed over the last eight years.

Every city, town and community is dealing with the economic malaise in the best way they know how. Particularly in rural communities, residents must help stabilize their economy by buying services and products locally while keeping optimistic.

A well-established economic development plan that has built a culture of staying pro-active in business recruitment, retention and workforce training means the times aren't quite as tough in southern Idaho.

A Swinging Campaign

Tackling the downturn head-on, the Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization (SIEDO) teamed up with The College of Southern Idaho to take a unique approach to getting through the tough times and preparing for the upturn with a regional multi-media campaign. The theme harkens back to childhood, comparing riding on a swing to riding out an economic downturn. It's called “Preparing For The Swing.”

“To keep the swing moving, you had to lean back, pump your feet and hold on for dear life,” the ad copy goes. “During an economic downturn, you have to lean back a little farther, pump a little harder and hold on a little tighter. It's the only way you can ride it back to the top.”

The ad urges residents to not only buy local, but to keep investing in infrastructure and training, and to “keep swinging.”

“By virtue of all the diverse businesses the region has attracted in the last seven years and the relative stability of our agriculture sector, the southern Idaho region is better positioned for this economic downturn,” said Jan Rogers, executive director of SIEDO. “However, the region will not be completely immune from the effects of the recession. But, by keeping its eye on the end game, taking advantage of additional

training and preparing our industrial sites for new development, the region will be better positioned for the upturn.”

With the sing-sing melody of “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” playing in the background, SIEDO’s radio and TV spots convey a hang-in-there attitude: the tough times will eventually pass, just hang on. And perseverance during these challenging economic times will pay off as this region is destined to experience a major upswing in businesses looking at this area.

“When this recession ends, we’re going to see a significant increase in businesses coming here looking for a business-friendly environment and strong workforce,” said Rogers. “It’s not going to be a trickle...it’s going to be a fire hydrant. And we’ll be ready.”

The print and broadcast campaign helps southern Idaho communities understand that the groundwork to support local plans to help stabilize the economy and offer training for future business growth is already in place. The campaign was developed only as a result of this well-designed base of regional economic opportunity.

The Foundation Is Set

It’s been years in the making: building a solid economic base that serves as a springboard for adding new tactics – like the swing ad campaign - during the downturn.

SIEDO was formed in 2001 as a joint venture of public and private sectors to diversify and strengthen the region’s local economies. Over the past eight years, a solid economic foundation has been built that has drawn over 30 new businesses to the area while almost 30 have expanded their businesses here, taking advantage of affordable land and a strong workforce.

A regional approach to building partnerships with both the public and private sectors, targeting specific industry sectors and growing a strong and qualified workforce has joined forces to keep southern Idaho’s rural and urban communities flourishing. This success is helping the region weather the current recession better than many areas of the country.

Calling All Workers

Workers are a vital link in the economic development swing. Business recruitment, retention and expansion simply won’t happen without a strong, trained and qualified workforce. To keep the labor force on pace with employer demands, southern Idaho last year established the Workforce Development Alliance (WDA), an organized and ambitious effort to immediately address current and future needs of a skilled and ready workforce, backed for a \$5 million USDOL WIRED federal grant.

This pro-active approach to feeding the business pipeline has already paid off. The WDA is working with educators to inform them about the many local jobs available in their communities that don’t require a four-year degree. In turn, they will share this information with students and their parents for consideration to pursue employment and job skill training locally.

SIEDO is also working on a communication campaign to parents, students, teachers/educators and business/industry to encourage consideration of the alternative careers that do not require a four-year degree. The College of Southern Idaho offers a number of technical skills training courses in manufacturing and construction that will help feed the local workforce pipeline now and in the future.

Businesses with trained and dedicated workforces find that together, the impact of the current national economic downturn a bit easier to tolerate.

Investing During the Recession

SIEDO's "swing" campaign goes beyond the standard "buy local" campaign. It urges community leaders to invest now, both in site development and workforce training.

One southern Idaho community, Jerome, has done exactly that. They're not allowing the state of the economy get in their way of bringing more jobs to the area.

This past December, Jerome County opted to create its own Urban Renewal Agency (URA), an entity normally used by cities of larger population.

According to Jerome Economic Development Director Marlin Eldred, "In a county, there's never been an Urban Renewal Agency formed. This will be the first in the state of Idaho."

Jerome County officials had been talking about forming a URA for almost two years. The Jerome County Urban Renewal Agency Crossroads Project's formation was confirmed just a few months ago to see through the county's strategic plan of business development, growth and job creation.

Con Paulos, Jerome resident and business leader says, "Considering what the economic conditions are presently in our nation this is just one more tool in our tool box to create more jobs in our region."*

To be sure, southern Idaho is experiencing the economic crunch, just as everyone else. But survival and the ability to jump back in the game happens to those communities/cities with basic, but established ED principles.

Southern Idaho has the resolve to carry on and not pull back during the downturn. Hard times are temporary. And this region is ready and waiting to ride the swing back to the top.

* KMVT-TV 12/17/08