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Metro Spotlight: Southern Idaho

By Joshua Rowe

Counties You Can Count On

South Central Idaho is comprised of eight counties, with Twin Falls being the most populous, increasing from 62,201 in 1997 to 73,053 in 2007, a jump of 17.5 percent. The area swiftly has become a regional retail hub for Southern Central Idaho, bolstering the population incline. The area has abundant natural resources and numerous recreational opportunities. The City of Twin Falls lies on the edge of the spectacular Snake River Canyon and is just two miles from the famous Shoshone Falls. With agriculture and food processing industries serving as stable economic pillars of the city, Twin Falls has weathered the downturn much better than many areas of the country. Good work prospects for job seekers and a moderate climate for retirement age people have helped keep Twin Falls County's population on a steady growth curve. Per capita income has increased from \$19,844 to \$27,259, or 37%. Twin Falls ranks 16th out of Idaho's 44 counties for per capita income, according to the Idaho Department of Labor's July 2008 statistics.

"The news is all about the economic downturn. We want people to focus on the inevitable upturn," says Jan Rogers, head of the Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization, which serves the Twin Falls area. "By keeping our eye on the end-game, we will be better positioned for that upturn."

Jerome County also has shown steady population growth during the past decade, rising 15% from 17,495 in 1997 to 20,066 in 2007. Much of this is a result of the county's outstanding economic development efforts. The dairy industry has increased dramatically and the resulting businesses like Jerome Cheese, WestFarm Foods, Inc., WOW Logistics, and Wal-Mart have made Jerome County an attractive place to work. Per capita income has grown from \$19,697 in 1997 to \$28,092 in 2006. Jerome ranks 10th in per capita income in Idaho.

A third county, Minidoka, has experienced a 9.4% decline in population from 1997, dropping from 20,495 to 18,564 people. This area had been heavily dependent upon agriculture and food processing jobs and, while these are still important components of the economy, there has been recent diversification. As a result, per capita income has increased from \$15,763 in 1997 to \$21,904 in 2006, a nearly 40% rise.



Shoshone Falls at Twin Falls, ID
Credit: www.city-data.com

Twin Falls and Jerome Counties Start-Up Costs (per square foot)

Warehouse Space	\$45
Retail Space (Shell Only)	\$56
Professional Office	\$105
Industrial Building	\$58
Medical Office Building	\$170
Technology Center	\$130
Manufacturing Facility	\$58

Source: Starr Corporation, August 2008

A Regional Effort Equals Valleys of Value

Economic development efforts often are undertaken on a community-by-community basis. In contrast, southern Idaho has taken a regional approach to development, which has generated significant interest among new businesses looking for a unique area to expand and build operations.

In some cases, linking regions to promote an area is simply impossible due to natural geographic barriers. Fortunately, southern Idaho offers two unique valleys in close proximity with individual strengths that are marketed in tandem to enhance the areas' economic development.

Entrepreneurial and tech-savvy businesses are drawn to the upscale, outdoor Wood River Valley in southern Idaho. An hour south is the more-populated Magic Valley that offers an ideal location for manufacturers and businesses that take advantage of transportation opportunities, a qualified workforce and a wide range of support services.

Easy freeway, railroad and airport access allows for efficiency in getting products to market. Manufacturing, alternative energy and distribution businesses all have been drawn to The Valleys' low cost of land, energy, and labor.

Overall Business Costs in Western States (% of National Average)

Idaho	90%
Arizona	98%
California	112%
Colorado	102%
Nevada	95%
Oregon	97%
Utah	92%
Washington	101%

Source: Moody's Economy.com Index, May 2007. After analyzing labor costs, tax burdens and energy costs, Moody's ranks Idaho the second lowest state in the West in overall costs of doing business.

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