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JEDCO celebrates 15 years of success

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JACKSONVILLE — The Jacksonville Economic Development Corporation (JEDCO) has spent 15 years with one goal — to build and sustain the economic and business growth of the city.

Beginning with the 1/2-cent sales tax for economic development passed by Jacksonville voters in 1995, JEDCO has re-invested more than \$10.8 million into the local economy through infrastructure projects with the City of Jacksonville, creating and retaining more than 3,000 jobs, creating the 130-acre Norman Industrial Park, attracting employers to Jacksonville, and improving the overall quality of life in the city.

"The Jacksonville Economic Development Corporation was formed because the citizens of Jacksonville recognized the importance of creating jobs and bringing capital investment in our community" said State Senator Robert Nichols, who served as the first chair of the JEDCO board. "The original board knew the footprint we laid would become a pattern for those that followed. In the first seven years, JEDCO identified about 1,200 jobs that were either brought into Jacksonville or saved.

"I was very proud to be the first chair and to have served for those seven years."

JEDCO is a seven-member board of volunteers appointed by the Jacksonville City Council.

Currently, the board consists of Chairman and former Mayor Gene Brumbelow, Secretary/Treasurer Shawn Eyre, Vice-President and former City Councilman Tim McRae, and board members Becky Bailey Hays, Dr. Miles McCall, Joe Teague and former City Councilman Jon Hargett. The President of JEDCO is Darrell Prcin.

"The need is greater than ever to assist local business expansion and attract jobs locally," Brumbelow said. "Jacksonville's vitality has always depended on job creation, and JEDCO and the EAC have a strong record of success for these 15 years.

"JEDCO must remain committed to the economic conditions to invest wisely to enhance our opportunities in a very competitive world for these jobs."

Serving along with the JEDCO board is the Economic Advisory Council (EAC).

This committee of volunteers is also appointed by the City Council, and serves as an advisory board to JEDCO. Ben Hamilton serves as chairman of the EAC, and others serving

on that board are Kay Keller, former Mayor and County Judge Harry Tilley, Marlene Jowell, H.P. Peoples, the Rev. Dwight Rivers, Jason Wofford, Jeremy Harmel, Ralph Lindsey, Nathan Jones and George Douglas.

These co-operative boards have had a long history of seeking out those projects that would be most beneficial to the city of Jacksonville.

"I was honored to serve as chairman of JEDCO from 2002 to 2009," said Robert N. Cudd, former JEDCO chair. "During that time, our strong, professional board had the opportunity to participate in numerous projects that ultimately improved the landscape of Jacksonville.

"We worked to bring Luvata Electrofin, 11x17, Inc., eTelecare (now Stream Global) and the TJC-Jacksonville nursing program to Jacksonville. We also worked with the City of Jacksonville on the purchase of the ladder fire truck, and numerous infrastructure projects."

Cudd said JEDCO's chief accomplishments are a testament to the board's goals and mission.

"Part of the success of JEDCO was due to the fact that we, as a board, had a clear direction and the ability to move quickly," he said. "Our goals were to not only attract businesses to Jacksonville, but to also help our existing businesses grow."

Current JEDCO President said the citizens of Jacksonville have every reason to be proud of the efforts of JEDCO.

"When you track the dollars that JEDCO has reinvested in companies and infrastructure in Jacksonville, we have an 87-percent success rate," he said. "In comparison with the national success rate of small business in the mid-20-percent, our success rate is even more impressive. Also, 18 percent of JEDCO's expenditures are being utilized for City infrastructure projects."

He said the Jacksonville voters are to credit for these successes.

"Economic development is extremely competitive, and having the ½-cent sales tax gives Jacksonville the edge we need to attract companies to our town," Prcin said. "More and more we are seeing that companies looking to relocate or expand are considering incentive packages from multiple communities before making the decision of where to grow their business."

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