

Economic development professionals make relocating to Henderson easy for businesses

So how does a city in Southern Nevada grow from less than 25,000 residents in 1980 to a projected 240,000 residents by the end of 2005? It starts with a lot of vision and the implementation of solid plans.

Visions and plans are something Bob Cooper and his staff know a lot about. Cooper is the manager of the economic development division of the City of Henderson – the once-upon-a-time sleepy Southern Nevada town that is now the second-largest city in the state of Nevada and fast-becoming a business bonanza in the southwest United States.

And with Henderson's population expected to more than double again within the next two decades, Cooper and his team are making dreams happen daily for business leaders across the country who want to take advantage of what Henderson and the rest of the Las Vegas Valley has to offer.

"Many people look at Henderson as a modern day boomtown," said Cooper, who has more than 30 years experience in economic development, specializing in business recruitment, local expansions and retention, and business creation strategies. "Our job is to help business leaders take advantage of the opportunities this market is providing and will be providing for years to come."

That process all starts by sharing information with those businesses who are interested in expanding or relocating to Henderson.

"The sharing of information between the company and our office is the most crucial step in this process," Cooper said. "The more upfront a business is with us about what they are looking for and what their expectations are, the better we can serve them and give them information that will help them make their decision on whether they want to do business in Henderson."

Because of this, confidentiality is a must.

"The people who are working with us need to know we can be trusted," said Jeff Leake, economic development officer for the City of Henderson. "Ultimately, relocating a company affects many people's lives and it is

not something that should be made public until the company believes it is the right time. We respect this and adamantly guard these discussions."

Working closely with economic development professionals is a must for businesses considering relocating or

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*Manager - Economic Development Division
City of Henderson*

expanding to any new area, according to Cooper. Because of the risk involved in such a move for a company, an economic development professional from an area will be able to provide the business leaders with an accurate understanding of the respective area's business climate and resources, its political climate and the possible incentive programs. The relationship will also improve the company's chances of short and long-term success in the new location.

Tom Collins is the vice president of Southwest Steel, which recently relocated to Henderson. He said working with the staff in Henderson benefited the company.

"I have been impressed with the help and assistance from Henderson's Economic Development Division in arranging meetings and helping get our plans and permits approved on what I feel was an expedited basis," Collins said. "Every time I called a representative and asked for 'help' he was quick to put me in touch with the 'right' people and took a personal interest in getting 'hitches' resolved.

"The division and the City of Henderson truly want to help businesses get established and relocated and they don't just 'talk the talk'... they get results."

More importantly, the support for those businesses does not stop once they are settled into Henderson. Programs such as industry roundtables with city leaders and industry

focus groups – in partnership with the Henderson Chamber of Commerce and Henderson Development Association – help the economic development division bring insight and continual opportunity for area businesses.

Another popular program is the Henderson One-on-One Business Visitation Program, which has been specifically developed to open communication lines between the city and local businesses. Local businesses are selected for an on-site interview at the local business owner or manager's facility. The visit team generally consists of at least one member of the economic development staff, a member of the Henderson Development Association and a city councilman.

"It's a powerful thing to have these people come visit you at your office and ask for your feedback on what they can do to benefit your business," said Pete Atkinson, president of Henderson's Black Mountain Community Bank and a member of the Henderson Development Association's board of trustees. "It's proactive and that is what Henderson is known for being – proactive with its businesses."

That's impressive for the growing southern Nevada city, whose population would make it the 14th largest city in the state of California – larger than such cities as Irvine, Glendale and San Bernardino.

"Our economic development division is a first-class operation," said Henderson City Councilman Steve Kirk. "We have business leaders tell us all the time what a joy it was to work with our staff and that they are looking forward to a solid working relationship with the city. That is when you know you are doing something right."

But, according to Cooper, it's about a little bit more than just business.

"The highest form of community service is to provide jobs for other people," Cooper said.

And businesses from across the country are benefiting – in Henderson, Nevada.

For more information on the City of Henderson's Economic Development Division, call (702) 267-1650.