



Our mission is to encourage economic development and growth and improve the business conditions of the Falls City area.

FALLS CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH ENTERPRISE VOLUME III ■ 2009

Falls City Earns Economic Development Certified Community Designation



"The NE Economic Development Certified Communities certification signals a community's dedication, leadership, and vision for growing and attracting new jobs and people."

Dave Heineman
Governor of Nebraska

Falls City is one of the newest communities to earn the [Nebraska Economic Development Certified Community](#) designation, joining an elite group of only 21 communities in the state to be certified.

The program, sponsored by the [Nebraska Diplomats](#) and administered by the [NE Department of Economic Development](#), is one of a few nationally that recognizes communities' economic development preparedness.

In making the announcement, state officials highlighted EDGE's development program, including:

- Local business recognition program that acknowledges various business, public, educational and industrial communities.
- Priority action plan focused on analysis and identification of new industrial sites, development of shovel-ready industrial sites and a virtual spec building.

- [Website](#) deemed "one of the best community ED web sites" by outside review teams impressed with its design and content.
- [Nebraska Investment Finance Authority Housing Study Grant Award](#) that will fund 50 percent of the cost of an updated housing study.

"Falls City's progressive and future forward attitude toward economic development makes it a natural for other mid- and small-sized cities in Nebraska to emulate," said Mary Gerdes, NE Diplomats President. "Falls City has made great strides in seizing and growing new, exciting economic and community development opportunities."

Representing Falls City at the award ceremony in Lincoln were Mayor Vandenberg, EDGE Board Member Beth Sichel, Executive Director Beckie Cromer and Administrative Assistant Cassey Whalen.

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Grand Weaver Hotel Debut

Governor Dave Heineman, State Senator Lavon Heidemann, Falls City Mayor Rodney Vandenberg and the community came together on June 24 to celebrate the revitalization of the historic Hotel Stephenson. “*Destination ... Falls City*” was the recurring theme throughout the evening and the newly named Grand Weaver Hotel is truly a destination place!



Florida entrepreneur and developer Mitch Glaeser, who purchased the hotel in 2007, unveiled to the community 16 renovated rooms and suites on the hotel’s fourth floor. The deluxe accommodations feature thick carpeting, solid wood furnishings, Jacuzzi tubs and darkly stained doors. Although the project still has a long way to go — the other three floors remain under renovation — what’s been finished impressed everyone who got an early tour.

Gov. Dave Heineman told the crowd he has stayed in some of the best hotels in the country. “None is better than what you’re going to see on the fourth floor,” the Governor said.

Stories of successful entrepreneurs who’ve come home to their small towns to reinvest aren’t unusual. But this isn’t that story. Before he bought the former Hotel Stephenson in 2007, Glaeser had never set foot in Falls City. He became interested in Falls City through a phone call from EDGE’s former economic development director, Renee Bauer. “What impressed me more than the solid bricks of the Hotel Stephenson was the attitude of business and community leaders,” Glaeser said. “They had recently completed major community projects and had plans to build a new \$22 million hospital.”

Since he bought the old hotel, Glaeser has purchased four other buildings — a former library, a dilapidated theater, a vacant bank and a downtown building that houses a pizzeria and closed gun shop. The library has already become a pharmacy, and Glaeser plans to turn the theater into a community performing arts center and the bank into a banquet hall.

“I like to effect positive change,” he said. “That’s what my being is all about. There was a sincere effort to turn Falls City into the showplace it once was,” he said. Now he’s fully invested in that effort. He has spent many days in Falls City over the past year and a half, working, eating in local restaurants and making new friends and contacts. “This is really not about Mitch Glaeser,” he said. “This is really about our ability — and that includes me because I’m a part of you now — to shine again.”

-Excerpts from Lincoln Journal Star story published June 24, 2009

Falls City Receives Housing Study Grant

Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA) awarded Falls City EDGE a \$12,000 matching grant in round three of the [Housing Study Grant Program](#). Grant funds are to be used for studies to stimulate ideas for comprehensive development plans encompassing housing, community and economic development opportunities in Nebraska. EDGE is utilizing the funding to produce an enhanced local housing and redevelopment plan for Falls City. This study will be the first step toward neighborhood revitalization and will focus on an improved housing inventory and potentially new housing developments. Additionally, the blight and substandard component of the study is the first step towards utilization of [Tax Increment Financing \(TIF\)](#) in Falls City. TIF is an economic development tool many Nebraska communities are aggressively using and a financing option that can assist us in developing new ways to build our community.

“EDGE is very pleased with this grant award,” said Executive Director, Beckie Cromer. “Available, quality housing is a key factor in Falls City’s success in attracting new businesses and attracting and retaining workers at all income levels. This comprehensive study will help us determine next steps on how to implement strategies which will improve the housing inventory and redevelopment efforts in Falls City.”

EDGE Filling the *Marketing-Sales Pipeline*

EDGE is continuing implementation of the quarterly target geographic direct marketing campaigns and building a qualified prospect database. Over 350 businesses and site selectors have been contacted this year. The sales approach involves direct mail, follow-up phone calls to qualify interest and sales calls on businesses expressing an interest in Falls City/Richardson County.

“While many businesses we’ve contacted do not have current expansion plans, several have indicated they will consider Falls City for future expansions,” said Steve Kottich, EDGE’s Vice President of Marketing & Sales. “We plan to stay in touch with these companies through our newsletter and personal contact. Our goal is to be ‘top of mind’ when these companies decide to make a move.”



EDGE is aggressively pursuing all prospect leads. The team traveled to Indiana in May to meet with a prospect considering a location in the Falls City Industrial Park. The visit was very well received and communications will continue to further strengthen the relationship as the economy picks up and demand for the company's product grows.

Local Manufacturers Positive about the Future

EDGE delivered cookie trays to local manufacturers during Business and Industry Recognition Week, to the local schools during Teacher Appreciation Week and to the long-term health care facilities during National Nursing Home Week. During the visits, EDGE thanked the employers for their investment and the jobs they provide to the community.

“Local manufacturers reported employment numbers are steady and indicated third and fourth quarter projections look strong,” said Beckie Cromer, EDGE Executive Director. “In general, everyone we talked to is positive and feels the economy is looking better.”

The EDGE sales team also made calls on the corporate headquarters of [Vantec](#) in Webster City, IA, and [Watkins Aircraft Support Products \(WASP\)](#) in Glenwood, MN, on April 28 and 29. Kevin Malone, EDGE President, was on the trip and said, “Both companies expressed appreciation for the visit and their commitment to Falls City.”

Who do you know?

... that might be a business development lead for Falls City. Consider your suppliers and buyers, business associates, friends, family members and others that could possibly benefit from a Falls City business location. Then take the next step ...

Contact [Beckie Cromer, EDGE Executive Director](#) to discuss the best contact approach. You can be assured EDGE will handle all referrals professionally and confidentially.

Falls City Industrial Park Expansion Update



*New Signage Points to
Falls City's Industrial
Opportunities*

EDGE is finalizing the acquisition of 10.1 acres of industrial land and has the opportunity to purchase an additional 55 acres to expand the Falls City Industrial Park. Jorgenson Surveying has completed surveying of the 10.1 acres and a topographical survey of the full 65 acres. EDGE is currently seeking bids from three engineering firms for site development and design of a virtual spec industrial building.

Upgrades to the available 17,700 sq. ft. industrial building have also been completed. (See photo on page 1.) [Visit the EDGE website to view building specs and download printable brochure » »](#)

“It is imperative Falls City has ‘shovel-ready’ sites available, as well as available buildings, in order to successfully attract new businesses and jobs to the community,” said Beth Sickel, EDGE’s Vice President of Product Development and Public Policy Advocacy. “We have made significant strides in increasing our inventory as outlined in our strategic and comprehensive plans.”

Southeast NE Economic Development Summit

A delegation of eight EDGE officials attended the Southeast Nebraska Economic Development 2009 Summit sponsored by the [Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development \(LPED\)](#), Chamber of Commerce and City of Lincoln on June 18. The group included: Beckie Cromer, Beth Sickel, Mayor Vandenberg, Bart Keller, Charlie Radatz, Jerry Oliver, Diana Orton and Gary Jorn. Phil Michel and Whitney Bumgarner of Nebraska Department of Economic Development joined the Falls City group for the luncheon keynote address which gave EDGE attendees the chance to network with these valuable partners.

The LPED formed the [Lincoln Area Development Partnership](#) in 2004 as a way to help market the region to companies and site selectors for new business locations. The Partnership is made up of 10 counties that surround Lancaster County, including Richardson County, and participates in a number of joint marketing and economic development events. This allows all the organizations to have more resources available for marketing efforts and allows the smaller communities, like Falls City, to participate in events that otherwise would be fiscally difficult. EDGE has participated in a wide range of regional marketing activities, including advertising in site selection publications, trade shows and online marketing.

The City of Lincoln recognized the move to regionalism in 2008 and applied to the [U.S. Department of Labor for a Regional Innovation Grant \(RIG\)](#). This grant is to assist regions in collaboration between economic development, education and workforce development in providing services that create a more skilled workforce to attract and retain jobs. Additionally, the grant will assist communities in identifying ways to integrate innovation into their economic development and training programs. Innovation has been at the forefront of local headlines with the creation of [Innovation Campus at UNL](#) expected over the next few years. The Partnership is committed to finding ways to promote innovation both in the public sector and private sector and have actively pursued policies and programs to expand on those efforts. The summit was designed as a kick-off of the RIG process.

The keynote speaker was [Ronnie Bryant](#); Bryant is President and CEO of the [Greater Charlotte Regional Partnership](#), a multi-county economic development program in Charlotte, N.C. Additionally, Bryant has managed regional programs in St. Louis and Pittsburgh. He is considered to be one of the foremost experts on regionalism in the United States and has served as Chairman of the [International Economic Development Council](#). In addition, there were presentations from [J.B. Milliken, President of the University of Nebraska](#), and [Steve Vierck from Angelou Economics](#). Gov. Dave Heineman and Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler provided the opening comments.

Nebraska Legislative Wrap-Up



The first session of the 101st Legislature was dominated by wildlife trapping, the death penalty and NRD taxing authority. But in-between those debates and mostly behind the scenes, state senators, working in collaboration with Governor Heineman made several policy decisions that will help Nebraska remain at the top of economic development rankings around the country.

LB 164 This flagship development legislation made several changes to the Nebraska Advantage Act. Most notably, the bill extended certain Nebraska Advantage tiers' sunset dates through 2015. This will give business and industry leaders the peace of mind in knowing that Nebraska is committed to these programs and is serious about growing its economy.

Other changes within LB 164 include allowing businesses the ability to amend their applications to qualify for another tier if they are unable to achieve the ambitious original thresholds. The bill also stabilizes the investment index, keeping our investment levels more attainable for more years to come. Under LB 164, companies applying under tier 6 now are allowed to use credits against all new employees at the project, among others provisions. Communities and businesses in rural areas were given an extra boost in LB 164. The Building Entrepreneurial Communities Act (BECA) and Value-added Agriculture (VAA) grant programs were extended until January 1, 2015. The Legislature also refunded these programs with a total of \$2 million dollars during the next two years.

LB 316 extended one of the most important development programs the State offered when first signed by the Governor. The Nebraska Advantage Customized Job Training program was extended through 2015, will help companies that are expanding in or relocating to Nebraska with assistance in training what is already considered one of the best workforces in the country.

LB 555 Another major advancement, this bill doubled the incentive for companies to conduct research and development (R&D) activities in Nebraska if they use state university or college personnel and conduct the R&D on a campus. This will help bring the state's universities and businesses together to develop new products and processes in order to expand our economy.

LB 315 DED's Travel and Tourism Division will have more funds to promote travel and tourism opportunities. A provision set aside \$1 million during the next biennium for a state marketing effort targeting markets outside of Nebraska, which is sure to increase business for Nebraska's homegrown attractions, resulting in positive economic impact.

When the Legislature concluded its business three days earlier than scheduled, it had made a significant impact on statewide economic development that will reverberate for years to come. DED thanks the Governor and Legislature for their continued leadership and vision in helping make Nebraska's economy one of the strongest in the nation.

-Reprinted from June 4 issue of the NE Dept. of Economic Development News Update

EDGE Mid-Year Event and Report Highlight

Public-Private Teamwork on the *Road to Success*

The EDGE Mid-Year Member Investors Event was held on Friday, June 26, to celebrate as a team EDGE's three-year journey on the *economic development road to success*. Over 60 members and their families attended this informal networking event.

According to Bart Keller, EDGE's Vice President of Investor and Community Relations, "We designed the event to be an informal, fun networking event. We kicked off the evening with tours of the newly renovated [17,700 sq. ft. available industrial building](#) (former Products Unlimited manufacturing facility), followed by a scavenger hunt that showcased Falls City's new developments and location assets, and ended with a BBQ dinner on the grounds of EDGE."

The EDGE Mid-Year Report, "2006-09 Milestones: Marking Our Journey on the Economic Development Road to Success" was released at the event. The report summarizes EDGE's many accomplishments and successes — pivotal milestones — over the past three years. "Reflecting back on the past three years or so, the *road to success* can be best summed up in the title and words of the Beatles' song, *The Long and Winding Road*," said Kevin Malone, who has served as president of EDGE since 2006, in his letter to investors. "Our travels have been marked by many accomplishments and successes, as well as challenges, such as an unprecedented downturn in the national economy. Throughout the journey, we have remained focused on our mission to encourage economic development and growth and improve business and quality of life conditions in our efforts to create a healthy and prosperous economy and job market for Falls City and Richardson County." He went on to thank past and current staff, board members and the active role of dedicated volunteers in shaping the future of Falls City. [Visit the EDGE website to download a copy of the report » »](#)



Want to learn more about how you can get involved in EDGE? Contact EDGE's Executive Director, Beckie Cromer, at 402.245.2105 or email director@fallscityedge.com.

EDGE *Lunch & Learn* Focuses on Technology in Education

The second quarter EDGE *Lunch & Learn* was held June 16. The topic of discussion was the "Evolution of Education" and featured presentations by teachers Gail Froeschl, Marie Parsons and Norm Fritz.

"Advancements in technology have drastically changed the way we work, live, do business and the way we educate," said Froeschl, who currently teaches second grade at Falls City North School. "From smart boards to iPods, teachers and students have access to many new, innovative learning tools." Froeschl noted that Falls City Public Schools and Sacred Heart School received an "Enhancing Education through Technology Grant" from the Nebraska Dept. of Education to develop and implement the [eduPod learning project](#) that utilizes iPod technology.



Marie Parson, who is retired from teaching, touched on the changing methods of teaching over her 37 ½ years in the classroom and Norm Fritz who is also retired discussed the challenges of adapting new technologies to skills education and training.

According to Microsoft Co-Founder Bill Gates, "Technology by itself is not the answer, of course. The answer is great teachers who are able not only to use technology but to rethink and adapt traditional curricula to its possibilities." Falls City has great teachers who are willing to do so.

Look for information coming soon on next quarter's *Lunch & Learn*.

Key Findings of EDGE Member Investors Survey

In May, EDGE conducted its first Member Investor Survey. The survey was conducted to measure and benchmark investors' satisfaction with EDGE's performance over the past three years and to gather input essential to developing a new strategic plan that will guide EDGE's program of work and actions over the next three years.



“We were very pleased to find that 100% of the member investors responding were very satisfied/satisfied with EDGE’s performance in achieving its mission of encouraging economic development and growth and improving the business conditions of the Falls City area,” said Bart Keller, EDGE’s Vice President of Investor and Community Relations. “However, we realize we must continue to stay focused to maintain this high level of support.”

Below are other key findings from the survey. We wish to thank all member investors who participated.

The Past ...

How satisfied are you with the progress EDGE has made in accomplishing its strategic objectives?

Strategic Objectives	Very Satisfied/ Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied	No Opinion
Branding/Marketing to Increase Awareness and Position the Greater Falls City Area as a Strategic Business Location	97%	0%	0%	3%
Facilitating Retention/Expansion of Existing Businesses	84%	11%	0%	5%
Attracting New Business Investments and Quality Employment Opportunities	97%	0%	0%	3%
Stimulating Entrepreneurial Growth and Development	76%	16%	0%	8%
Strengthening the Competiveness of the Greater Falls City Area Business Location Product	97%	3%	0%	0%

The Future ...

How important do you feel each of the following strategic objectives would be in developing a new three-year economic development strategic plan?

Strategic Objectives	Very Important/ Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Branding/Marketing to Increase Awareness and Position the Greater Falls City Area as a Strategic Business Location	97%	3%	0%
Facilitating Retention/Expansion of Existing Businesses	100%	0%	0%
Attracting New Business Investments and Quality Employment Opportunities	100%	0%	0%
Stimulating Entrepreneurial Growth and Development	94%	6%	0%
Strengthening the Competiveness of the Greater Falls City Area Business Location Product	100%	0%	0%

-continued on page 8

EDGE Member Investors Survey –continued from page 7

From your perspective, what are the top "economic development" issues that need to be addressed over the next three years?

Top Economic Development Issues	Response Percentage
Incentives to Retain/Attract/Start-Up Businesses	83%
Industrial Site & Building Development	56%
Housing Development	50%
Worker/New Resident Attraction/Retention	47%
Workforce Development - Training and Education, Student Internships, etc.	44%
Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements	42%
Quality of Living Enhancements/Development	28%
Other	3%

In striving to keep EDGE investor members and community stakeholders informed of EDGE's work, how would you rate the value of the following communications tools?

Communications Tool	Very Valuable/ Valuable	Little Value	No Value
EDGE Website - Member Investors Section	97%	3%	0%
EDGE Newsletter	97%	3%	0%
Media Relations	97%	3%	0%

For more information on the survey and/or to learn more about how you can get involved in EDGE, please contact EDGE Executive Director Beckie Cromer at 402.245.2105 or director@fallscityedge.com.

EDGE Co-Sponsoring Business Plan Competition



Invest Nebraska Corporation, a venture development organization that advises and invests in companies and early stage business ideas, is sponsoring the [2009 Southeast Nebraska New Venture Competition](#) in partnership with the Southeast Nebraska Partners for Progress and Peru State College. EDGE is a member of Partners for Progress, a five-county regional economic development organization.

The competition is open to anyone interested in operating a business in the southeast Nebraska counties of Richardson, Pawnee, Nemaha, Johnson or Otoe counties. All entrepreneurs, as well as local business owners looking to expand or improve their businesses, are welcome to submit their business plan. On October 9 a panel of judges, comprised of business and community leaders, will identify the most promising business plan. The winning entrepreneur or team will receive a minimum \$20,000 equity investment into their business.

For more information about the application process you can visit investnebraska.com or contact Dan Hoffman at 402.472.2063. Individuals in Falls City/Richardson County preparing business plans are encouraged to contact EDGE for assistance at 402.245.2015 or director@fallscityedge.com.

EDGE EMPLOYER SPOTLIGHT on *Falls City Mercantile, Inc.*



Celebrating 90 Years in Business!

Falls City Mercantile, Inc. was the focus of EDGE's second quarter Employer Spotlight. To recognize this successful, innovative small business, EDGE sponsored an Open House on July 1. EDGE also featured the employer in an advertorial placed in the Falls City Journal. Read the following excerpt from the advertorial to learn more about this Falls City business and EDGE investor:

“Peanuts! Popcorn! Crackerjacks!” If you have purchased anything at a concession stand at a local athletic contest over the past few months, chances are strong that something you bought was a product supplied by the Falls City Mercantile Company, and concession items would not be the only types of products available at this local company. In the words of owner/operator Bill Simon, “the Falls City Mercantile is a broad line food service distributor, servicing hospitals, schools, restaurants and private individuals.”

Simon further explains that the Mercantile offers “anything and everything to do with the food industry.” The delivery service area encompasses a 60-mile radius which includes Southeast Nebraska, Northeast Kansas and Northwest Missouri, providing products to approximately 175-200 regular weekly customers. The business also maintains accounts in Lincoln and in Omaha.

As a walk-in customer at the Mercantile, you can purchase paper products, potato salad, hamburger patties, hot dogs, frozen pies and a host of other items from their product listings. You can choose from the most popular items of Omaha Steaks, Cedar Hollow Hams and assorted frozen appetizers; or you can select any of the 6,000 other products.

As prosperous as this business is today, its beginnings were most probably a risky business proposition. According to current owner Bill Simon, his great-grandfather Frank Simon moved from Rulo to Falls City in 1917 to

retire. In Rulo, Simon had run a drug store, and he retired with a nest egg of \$100,000. A group of six businessmen owned a drug store and wholesale company that was losing money. Simon stepped in to try to turn the business around and ended buying the business six months later. This began the involvement of the Simon family in what became known as the Falls City Mercantile.

Members of the Mercantile family have contributed greatly to the Falls City community. The Mercantile is a member of EDGE, supporting the community's economic development growth initiatives. The company supports the youth of the area by contributing to prom events and ball teams and provides strong support for the hospital.

The future looks bright for the grocery, industrial paper product and frozen food wholesaler. Simon sees no effect of the country's financial situation and sees the business growing every year with the hope of expanding product lines and service territory in the future.

Quality products. Excellent service. Reasonable prices. As Thomas Burton of Hardin, Missouri, states in a review printed in Merchants Circle, “*The greatest food and the prices are reasonable. When it is time to host a large party, I can count on the Falls City Mercantile to have the necessary supplies and food. If I have any questions about the preparation of the food, I can count on Bill and Dan for proper preparations. Two great cooks.*” AND two great members of the Falls City business community.

Full-page advertorial placed in the Falls City Journal was created in collaboration with the Sacred Heart High School Journalism teachers and students.



Meet Cassey Whalen



Cassey Whalen joined EDGE in April as Administrative Assistant.

Cassey was born in Pender, NE. She has lived and attended school all over the state of Nebraska, and for a while resided in Hartford, CT. Cassey is a graduate of Friend High School in Friend, NE, and Lincoln School of Commerce with a degree in travel and tourism.

She has had a wide range of work experiences, including reservations agent for American Airlines, travel agent/manager of The Travel Center, lab technician for Prairie Eyecare, bank teller for Richardson County Bank, assistant manager of UMB Bank and sales representative for Wolfe's Printing. Cassey has also been very involved in the community, currently serving as vice president of the Falls City Area Chamber of Commerce.

"When it came time to settle down and raise my daughter, I knew I wanted to be in a small town in Nebraska. For the past 15 years I have lived here, Falls City has been wonderful to my family and me said Whalen. "We are very fortunate to have such a progressive and family-friendly small town community with all the amenities of a larger city — but without all the hassles. It's exciting to be part of the EDGE team. I very much enjoy working with the director, board and the community to promote the Falls City area and generate economic development growth opportunities."

You can reach Cassey at the EDGE office or email cassey@fallscityedge.com.

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