

## State of the Tri-Lakes Region 2017 address, given by Terri Hayes, President of the Tri-Lakes Chamber, EDC and Visitor Center

The first thing I would like to do, is to thank you for your membership, your support, your advice, and your friendship. Without any of the above, the Chamber would not be able to thrive or even exist.

I have started this annual speech the exact same way the past couple of years. I thought about changing things up this year but the truth is, I could not say it any better. This community, it's businesses and the organizations we work with, do mean the world to us. In our line of work, it truly does take a village to be successful.

It is an honor to be joining you again for our Annual State of the Chamber. But wait, this year, it is the State of the Tri-Lakes Region! We are now the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation and Visitor Center. Three hats all under one roof. But what does this mean for us really?

I grew up in the pacific northwest, in several different places. My family moved around a lot and not for military reasons. I came to Colorado 10 years ago, started in Black Forest and now live in Monument.

Although this is only the second longest place I have lived, it by far is the one that has made me feel the most at home. I know I am not alone in loving the small town feel the Tri-Lakes region exudes, whether you live here, work here or do business here.

There is always a big question that is common in smaller communities: how do we keep this feeling without becoming stagnant or without pushing every piece of green space by the wayside? The answer is, you find the middle that works.

The biggest change we faced in 2016, and going forward as an organization in 2017, is the addition of the Tri-Lakes Economic Development Corporation.

I am very happy we were in a position to make this happen and that our board of directors had confidence that this was the right direction to be moving. Going forward, we want to be the one to help the community figure out that middle.

I have been asked what do we hope to accomplish in this endeavor. We are starting by taking small steps. The first one, is to identify all our primary employers. A primary employer is one in which the majority of their income comes from outside the region. This helps bring new money into our area.

An example would be a manufacturer, a hotel, a research and development facility or some service sectors. The jobs in these primary companies create the disposable income that promote the growth of secondary businesses like retail, restaurants, entertainment and all those small mom and pop businesses people love to work with.

In my opinion, those mom and pops are the ones that are the largest contributor to the warm small-town feel. However, without healthy primary employers around them, many mom and pops struggle to stay healthy themselves.

Does anyone know how many primary businesses there are in the Tri-Lakes area? Neither do we...yet. Our first task as the Economic Development Corporation, is to complete our identification of all those businesses. There are quite a few more than most would imagine, but that list will be done in the next few weeks.

After that, it is my job, with the help of our EDC committee, to reach out to these businesses and let them know we are here and to please let us know if there are local challenges they are experiencing that we might be able to assist in.

A few challenges the EDC has helped with over the past few years, were an internet connection issue and a parking challenge that might seem minor to some, but to the business, it might be enough of a problem that they would consider leaving the area. Other challenges we currently are seeing are staffing issues which could also tie into the lack of attainable housing.

The best first step we can take for our beloved small businesses is to help assure the future of our current primary businesses.

Our next step will be to look at our community and see what businesses or industries are we lacking that could help make our quality of life and working environment better. Right now, we have no idea what those are or even if there are any. But it needs to be looked at. A perfect example of a much-needed business is that of an assisted living facility.

Thanks to Bethesda, we are getting that. Over the years, I have taken many calls from those looking to move into the area but decided against it because we did not have a place near-by for their ailing parent. Thank goodness Bethesda saw the need and are currently under construction with their newest facility, in Monument. Our goal, is to help identify any future needs, like this one, and help them be met.

I wanted to talk about this because, one, the EDC is new to us. It is a big undertaking but one we are ready for. Two, I know as a community, we are headed for some changes, mainly in the form of growth. Some will embrace it and some will not.

As an organization, we will do our best to communicate to the residents and business owners why a community cannot keep every blade of grass exactly the same and expect to prosper. But on the other hand, it is not necessary to mow every single blade of grass down either.

With the future expansion of I-25 and the fact this area is so darn adorable to live in, we need to embrace the growth but guide it instead of letting it control us. We will be here to support the Town of Monument, the Town of Palmer Lake and El Paso County as they too figure out what their Economic Development futures look like.

With all we now have to offer, whether you are an emerging small business, experiencing growing pains, or a larger organization, we want you to think of us as your proactive business partner. You can look to the chamber to provide business development opportunities, solid business strategies and effective advocacy, all geared towards your success. Engaging with us dramatically expands your connections.

Advocacy is something you will see a little more from us this year. We dabbled a little in it last year, by publishing the stance our board took on a few legislative matters. We have not done that in many years. But when an issue dramatically affects business, either positively or negatively, we feel it is our responsibility to pass that information on to our members. We know most business owners do not have the time or sometimes the stomach to really delve into issues.

Thanks to our relationships with several other organizations and through our own research, we will be better equipped than ever to inform our members on those important business related topics.

In 2017 we will be doing a much better job of communicating what we are doing behind the scenes. Our networking events are a small part of what we do on a day to day basis, yet all of it is in support of you, our members.

We get invited to the table for most topics that come up for discussion locally and regionally. When it makes sense, we consider it our job to educate decision makers, in a manner that helps our businesses. Our community role is growing every year and I know we have a positive and influential impact on those around us.

We provided, at your seats, a brief look at some statistics and some highlights from 2016. We had a great year last year and know we will have an even better one this year. We have a board who is not afraid to take chances and move forward. Our ambassadors have been with us every step of the way, supporting us in too many ways to mention. They serve as our window into what our members are wanting and needing from us.

Can I have all the current ambassadors stand and let's give them a round of applause.

At this time, I want to say a heartfelt thanks to everyone who continues to support us year after year.

Thank you for being a part of our Chamber & EDC family.

We look forward to providing an even better partnership for our members and community in 2017.

We are committed to your success.

Lastly, we are celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, this month. Enjoy the cake, help us celebrate and let's have another great 40 years.