

Association working on industrial park for Craigmont

By Sandra L. Lee of the Tribune
May 26, 2010

The Clearwater Economic Development Association is working to help establish an industrial park at Craigmont, where a Lewiston business wants to create something new - a foundry.

If successful, it would produce parts that now come from outside the region. Two foundries are being purchased and their equipment moved here, CEDA Executive Director Christine Frei told the Nez Perce County Commission and Lewiston City Council Monday.

Just last week, it was learned two other grants have been approved, Frei said.

One for \$22,000 will be used to hire a consultant to help establish an American Viticultural Area that will benefit the region's wine industry. The second is for \$21,350 to bolster the ability of small manufacturers to compete for federal Department of Defense contracts.

CEDA is providing assistance to First Step Internet to obtain a \$2.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce to improve rural telecommunications.

A three-year project to create a telecommunications network is under way to link hospitals and increase accessibility to mental health services.

The association brought \$840,465 into the region, including \$300,000 to recapitalize a loan program that assists small businesses that don't qualify for conventional loans, Frei said. Fifty-seven of the 198 loans CEDA has made have been in Nez Perce County, she said, and 75 percent of the businesses that received money are still in business today.

CEDA makes loans up to \$150,000, but it also has a microloan program that deals with smaller amounts of \$3,500 to \$5,000.

The 43-year-old association's main purpose is to work with communities to obtain grants that address regional needs, particularly those affecting economic development, Frei said. One of the reasons some grants have been successful, such as the expansion of the Port of Lewiston dock and the Southside Industrial Park at the Lewiston-Nez Perce County

Regional Airport, is they were presented as regional projects, she said.

The present focus is on assisting smaller local manufacturers, which provide living-wage jobs, so they can grow, she said.

A major effort is under way now to assist boat builders with establishing relationships that will allow export of Idaho-built boats to the European Union, particularly Germany. Skipper magazine will be in town next week to do an in-depth feature on the region's boat manufacturers.

CEDA works with other organizations on economic development issues, but it doesn't duplicate work done by any of them, Frei said.

Membership spans the five north central Idaho counties, several towns and a number of other organizations, including the Port of Lewiston, the Nez Perce Tribe, Lewis-Clark State College and several private businesses. Each pays membership dues, ranging from \$120 from Valley Transit to \$8,796 from Nez Perce County, which includes dues for the towns of Culdesac, Lapwai and Peck, and \$6,216 from the city of Lewiston. Dues are based on population, Frei said.
