

Small businesses help Conover in past, future



Written by Jordan-Ashley Baker (O-N-E Staff Writer)

Thursday, 31 December 2009



Small businesses played an important part in Conover's economic development over the last decade, said former Conover mayor Bruce Eckard.

"Small businesses grow and generate jobs," Eckard said.

Eckard said that the development of Exit 132 off Interstate-40 also helped Conover grow. The addition of Wal-Mart and the strip mall by the new exit created jobs and encouraged people to shop, Eckard said.

New restaurants, such as Dos Amigos and Nagano's, are other businesses responsible for the city's development, he said.

Conover also benefited from the recent growth and annexation of Rock Barn Golf and Spa, which is considered a medium-sized industry. Rock Barn increased Conover's tax base and employed hundreds of people, Eckard said.

But not all of Conover's businesses survived the recent economic downturn.

In 1994, after 40 years in Conover, General Electric closed its plant. Many people lost their jobs. And the city continues to deal with the company's loss.

"Big industries leave and create a vacuum after they're gone," said Conover City Manager Donald Duncan, Jr.

Many people look to the government for a quick solution, but that won't always happen, said Duncan, who has been city manager for three years.

"You have to think long term," Duncan said. "What we do today won't have an impact for five, 10 or 20 years."

Conover's population grows steadily, said Duncan.

This stable growth keeps taxes low.

Cities with an extreme growth rate have high taxes, he said.

Despite Conover's growth, some people are reluctant to put trust in local government, Duncan said.

The recently publicized corruption scandals of high-ranking government officials, such as South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford, have made many people wary of local lawmakers, Duncan said.

This concern consequently puts stress on Newton's elected officials, he said.

"They're trying their best," Duncan said. "We work for a city that doesn't have any (corruption)."

A combined interest in sustainable living and saving money has made many Conover residents look for more energy-efficient power sources.

Conover has a huge potential for alternative energy sources in the future, Duncan said.

Although it's unlikely that Conover will ever be home to dozens of windmills, small-scale changes, such as heating homes with solar panels, will make a big difference to Conover residents, he said.

Duncan said thinks Conover residents will live more economical lives in the city's next ten years.

They will return to lifestyles reminiscent of the way people lived after the Great Depression, Duncan predicted.

"People will focus on saving money and being frugal," he said.

"I want to make sure our grandchildren won't have a problem calling Conover home," Eckard said. "I want it to be a better place in the future than it is today."

Last Updated (Thursday, 31 December 2009)