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City earns nod for drawing commerce

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While some cities are fighting huge budget deficits or teetering on bankruptcy, the city of Santa Clarita was recognized last week with two economic Award of Excellence honors at the annual California Association for Local Economic Development conference held in Sacramento.

The city's 21-point business plan for progress won second place in the category of Economic Development. Created early in the recession, the business plan focused on economic progress within the city after construction projects nearly came to a complete standstill.

The city's marketing campaign originally designed to encourage local residents to shop locally and support local businesses, "Think Santa Clarita," won the second economic Award of Excellence honor. The campaign has also been used to attract business leaders outside of the area to the benefits of locating their businesses in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Both awards recognize outstanding and innovative programs that result in a significant economic contribution to an area.

Previous award winners have included export-trade programs, business-finance programs and innovative economic strategies.

"Santa Clarita is a premier city, where successful companies do business, and we're proud to receive this recognition of the work we have done to keep our local economy healthy and our businesses strong," said Mayor Marsha McLean.

The city's 21-point business plan was designed to boost the local economy and support local businesses, encourage job creation and retail spending, and attract shoppers from outside the valley.

Program successes

In July 2010, all of the business initiatives were evaluated, and the most successful programs under the recessionary plan were tolled into the city's ongoing business-development plans.

The Think Santa Clarita business attraction campaign first kicked off in April 2009. The campaign promoted Santa Clarita as a business-friendly community and began with a multipage advertising spread in the Southwest airlines magazine.

The result was companies moving their headquarters to Santa Clarita, and more recently, the Mind Your Own Business show relocating from Orange County to Santa Clarita, Crawford said.

The entrepreneurial event takes place May 14 at College of the Canyons Valencia campus.

"The biggest success was seeing so many businesses relocate to Santa Clarita using a combination of the programs of the plan, said Jason Crawford," marketing and economic development manager for the city of Santa Clarita. "They included Advanced Bionics, Ronan Engineering, Quest Diagnostics, Palyon and Quallion — which means more jobs for our residents."

The film incentive program attracted television and movie productions when the city worked with the California Film Commission, Crawford said. Pairing up with the state was a key factor in bringing productions like "Faster," "Scooby Doo! Curse of the Lake Monster," "Priest," "Pretty Little Liars" and "Justified" to Santa Clarita.

The city secured grants that allowed it to invest more than \$665,000 in 35 local businesses through energy efficiency and building improvements, small-business grants, and in working with the Small Business Development Center to help businesses get the tools they needed to weather the recession.

In the past year, the city's 21-point business plan added to the local economy by attracting more than 650 new, high-quality jobs, generating more than \$117 million in tax savings for local businesses through the Santa Clarita Enterprise Zone, assisting more than 15,000 job seekers with free resources including skill and empowerment workshops at the Santa Clarita WorkSource Center and awarding more than \$675,000 in grant funding to local companies for business improvements.

Repeat winner

The city of Santa Clarita launched an aggressive \$18 million dollar economic-stimulus plan in 2009, and is home to several businesses in four major industry segments, making it a desirable community for businesses to locate.

The industries include aerospace, manufacturing, biomedical and entertainment. Business-friendly incentives such as the Enterprise Zone and Use Tax credits have attracted many companies, including the Disney at the Ranch studio-production project set to break ground in the next 18 months.

The Award for Excellence honors for the city's 21-point business plan and Think Santa Clarita campaign follows several other awards, including wins for the city's film and tourism programs in 2006 and 2007, and a 2008 win for the small-business support and retention program.

The city also received recent recognition for a number of economic development successes from American Cities of the Future Awards, one of the top-three communities recognized in the Small Cities of the Future category and earned a top-10 ranking in the Small Cities, fDi Strategy category by fDi, an international finance magazine.

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