

# Three groups help businesses, visitors

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The Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce's role sometimes overlaps with economic development, and the Sherman County Convention and Visitors Bureau frequently crosses paths with the two.

Some have suggested having three groups isn't necessary, but directors of the Chamber and visitors bureau disagree.

Economic development has a lot of different faces, a lot of different facets, said Donna Price, visitors bureau director.

"My job is basically to do marketing to bring people into the community," she said, "but about 99 percent of those who move here come as a traveler first. We all touch them at some point."

The visitors bureau, Chamber and Sherman County Economic Development have been sharing space in a historic hotel at 10th and Main. The bureau and economic development will remain there, but the Chamber has moved into its own office at 106 E. 11th. The Chamber director says the organization rented space at a discount from economic development while getting back on its feet — now that it is self-sufficient, the Chamber is ready to look to the future.

One of the most important things the Chamber can do, said Andi Nelson, Chamber executive director, is promote a positive attitude.

"The last few years have been hard with the drought," she said; "we're an ag community. I think some people have forgotten how great Goodland is — they need to be reminded."

The Chamber brings the community together, plans events, helps the community to work together.

The Chamber, economic development and convention and visitors bureau cross, but they don't do the same job. Economic development is more involved in bringing in new businesses and helping businesses with major expansion, she said, while the Chamber helps existing businesses to thrive and grow.

The biggest overlap, said Sandy Trachsel, Chamber board treasurer, is in growth — both economic development and the Chamber help businesses and the community to grow.

But the Chamber is the cornerstone of the community, Nelson said — across the country people call the Chamber office when they plan to move to a town.

Nelson said she gets calls all the time that are for economic development or the visitors bureau, and she answers their questions when she can, but refers them to the other organization when needed.

Price said she also gets messages for the Chamber and economic development and forwards the information to them. They work together to help people interested in coming to

Goodland.

"We all have jobs to do," she said, "and we do them for the good of our community."

"I want to get people into our community and get them to spend the night — longer if they choose to — and spend money. Some maybe will decide they like it here and move or come to visit each year."

"I love the travel and tourism side; I love to promote the uniqueness of Goodland and get people to want to come here."

Things the Chamber does, Nelson said, include promoting local businesses, educating business people, organizing promotional events, providing relocation packets for potential new residents, giving referrals to people in and out of Goodland needing services, working with legislators to promote laws that support the development and growth of the community, and working to improve the appearance and atmosphere of Goodland.

The Chamber also helps educate its members, she said, through seminars and soon-to-come hospitality clinics, which will teach business people how to greet customers and how to promote Goodland, she said.

The visitors bureau gets its money from a transient guest tax collected from people who stay at hotels, Price said, and that money has to be spent on tourism and marketing. That marketing brings more people in, she said, they spend

more money, and their tax money is spent to reach more people. These are not stagnant dollars, she said; they are rivers of money the area wouldn't have if it weren't for people coming to see the giant Van Gogh replica, tour the museum, stay at Kuhrt Ranch or go hunting.

All of those people spend money in the stores, at restaurants and on fuel, Price said; hunters spend well over \$100 a day on hunting licenses, fuel, shells and other supplies and food.

If someone stays the night, she said, they will buy at least a meal or two, fill the gas tank and maybe even shop in the stores. The visitors bureau spends part of its budget marketing the county at trade shows in Denver, Kansas City and Wichita, Price said, and last year at one in Long Beach, Calif.

Price also serves as president of the Northwest Kansas Travel Council, working with the council on marketing the area, and works with the I-70 Association and the Travel Industry Association of Kansas.

The groups co-op marketing, she said; none of them could afford to do as much marketing on their own. Working with the region and the state opens opportunities for Sherman County, she said.

What Nelson would look at as success in 10 years would be seeing high quality in area businesses and the way of life here and a positive attitude.

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