

Vista CARES Supports Businesses In Vista Through Leadership from Kevin Ham

Decade: 2000-2009

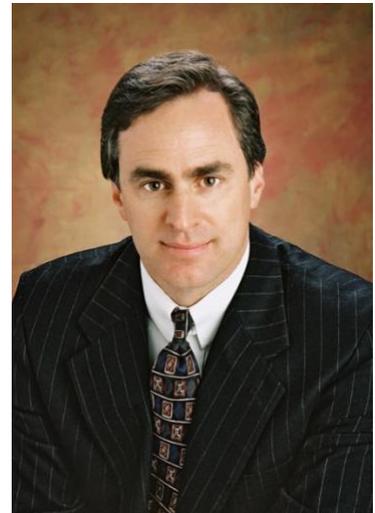
Why did you get involved in economic development?

I got involved in Economic Development to make a difference, to solve problems, to help people and I love the work.

Describe the project/program that you were a lead on (list multiple phases if any)

The Vista CARES program includes two main components: company visits conducted throughout the year by economic development staff with council members, and a bi-annual volunteer participation event called the Vista CARES Business Walk. Since the program began in 2002, the program has grown substantially and is now a staple event for the City of Vista. Below are the growth phases of the program:

1. Phase 1: Business Retention visits begin
 - a. Program Launch – 2003 through 2005, retention business visits began and a process was developed
 - b. Program Growth – 2005-2007 the program gained interest from volunteers across a variety of industries and organizations
 - c. Program Stability – 2007-2018 the program became known as a staple event for the City of Vista that both business and community volunteers look forward to each year
2. Phase 2: Business Walks begin
 - a. Program Launch – 2011 -2013, Business Walk begins and the program process developed
 - b. Program Growth 2013- 2015 program gained support from community volunteers and business professionals
 - c. Program Stability 2015-2018 the program is a sophisticated, well run, replicable process with City and community support



Vista CARES is a staple event representing Economic Development to the community.

What was challenging and/or rewarding working on this project/program?

Each year since its inception, the process of organizing and managing the Vista CARES program has become stronger. The Vista Chamber of Commerce is a valuable community partner that recruits volunteers and assists in advertising the Business Walk and keeps businesses engaged throughout the year. As the event has increased in popularity, more private companies are offering to host the event headquarters and provide food and refreshments for volunteers, helping the program maintain an average annual budget of \$500 or less.

This program is rewarding because it allows the City to connect with businesses face-to-face in order to help solve their biggest challenges. The community support for the event really brings awareness to the discipline of economic development and its importance to our City.

Briefly explain the impact the project/program has had or will have on employment, expansion of local tax base & diversification of the area's economy?

The Vista CARES program is useful in helping the city understand business trends, and provides insight into the needs of specific businesses often revealing new issues that the city works to fix.

Through business visits, economic development staff identified that businesses in the business park wanted to have hotels nearby for visiting clients and executives. City staff worked to identify sites and hotel companies that could fit the market need. As a result of identifying this need, City staff successfully attracted a Marriot and Hyatt to the business park area which not only serves the needs of businesses, but contributes to the economic base of the City with ToT.

A representative from the Federal Trade Commission joined a downtown Vista CARES Business Walk and was able to hear the need for breweries to expand into new markets. As a result, a series of international trade workshops were conducted and today, three Vista breweries distribute their product in overseas markets.

The most significant ROI of the program is retaining businesses that pay taxes and provide quality jobs. In addition to retaining businesses, the work of Vista CARES has resulted in the attraction of two new hotels which contribute ToT.

What advice would you give to other economic development professionals when working on a similar project/program?

Work hard, be confidential, know there is always a solution, keep a smile on your face, enjoy your work and know that no task is too small.

Other communities can easily replicate this program as a way to connect with the business community. In 2018, a neighboring city of Vista, Oceanside, successfully replicated the program and hosted their first Business Walk. I recommend partnering with a local Chamber of

Commerce or Main Street organization, if possible, and involving council members so they feel included in the process.

Please list any social media usernames and website addresses so that other members can connect with you.

Twitter: @kevinjamesham

City Economic Development Website: CityofVista.com/EconomicDevelopment