

## How Steven J. Lantsberger Helped Bring 400 Jobs to Tehama County

*Decade: 1990-1999*

### ***Why did you get involved in economic development?***

To be quite honest I had never heard the term until after I graduated from California State University, Chico! I was working for Dun & Bradstreet at the time (Burlingame, CA) and my father sent me a job posting about an opening for an Economic Development Specialist for Yuba County, CA. I applied for the job and what do you know I first stepped into the economic development profession.

After getting my bearings and working with some great mentors I knew that this was a profession that I could see as a career. Having worked with Fortune 500 executives in my Dun & Bradstreet days gave me the confidence that I effectively communicate with high powered individuals and make an effective sales pitch about the community I was representing. I got involved and stayed involved for the past 33 years because I enjoyed making a difference in the communities, I have had the pleasure to serve.



I have 33 years of uninterrupted economic development experience under my belt now. I have learned much, worked with great people, had great success, and most importantly the opportunity to share what I have learned with others. People ask me would I change my career path if I could do it all over again? Absolutely NOT!

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

The northern California Wal-Mart Distribution Center - affectionately known when it was first introduced to me at "DF 90-10." Back in the ole' days the State Department of Commerce (DOC) would label their leads for confidentiality with the initials of the lead state official, in this case Dave Freitas.

This was a statewide (albeit more Northern California) site location search that was being administered by the DOC. When it first was introduced to me and the others in the state competing for the project it was described as a



1.2 million square foot retail distribution center that would create 400 jobs and result in a capital investment of \$40,000,000. In the early 1990s this was a "game changer" project for many a community.

Tehama County, with a population of around 50,000 at the time had two main incorporated cities, Red Bluff and Corning. As the Executive Director of TLDC, it was my responsibility to oversee and implement all business attraction efforts, including this project which was very



early on in my career at TLDC. The Tehama County Board of Supervisors, Cities of Red Bluff and Corning, my Board of Directors, and the community-at-large were "all-in" to land this trophy project. This was the early 1990s and the country was enduring a lasting recession and unemployment was very high, especially in Tehama County who had just saw all of its sawmills closed due to the listing of the Spotted Owl.

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

Like most business attraction opportunities, the biggest challenge was the intense competition for this investment. Larger surrounding areas had more financial resources and siting options to present. One of the most rewarding aspects of the project was being introduced to the landowner and being able to take this project from concept to completion while navigating entitlement challenges, including wetlands, and the ultimate completion of a general plan amendment that paved the way for final site negotiations with Wal-Mart.

Also rewarding was the broad-based support for the project and the show of this support by a petition drive that garnered over 2,200 signatures in less than a week. Community volunteers, including the landowners staked out high traffic areas to explain the project and gather the signatures. Given the corporate culture of Wal-Mart, and its founder Sam Walton, we felt this approach would make an impact. In the end, we can only assume it made an impact on the final decision makers.

***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?***

Initially, the project was expected to invest approximately \$40,000,000 (in 1992 dollars) into the County. When it was all said and done the final investment nearly doubled to \$70,000,000. During initial hiring, there were over 7,000 applicants for the 400 positions, and folks came from as far as Idaho for a job opportunity. At full employment, including truck drivers, there were over 1,400 associates at the facility...and Wal-Mart continues to serve its stores from that Distribution Center today. Wal-Mart represented Tehama County's first large footprint (1.2M square foot) retail distribution project and helped move the county away from relying on resource-based industries for employment and income. This project resulted in the Tehama Local Development Corporation being named as one of the Top 10 Development Groups in the nation in 1993.

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

Don't ever underestimate yourself or your community in these highly competitive projects. Sure, Tehama County was truly an underdog as we pursued the project. We were hungry for development and the project represented a new future for the County. Residents, businesses, elected officials all stepped up and did more than was expected. It was a true community effort. My best advice is to know your community, know the expectations of the project proponent and then develop a strategic plan that will align the too. It's not always about the biggest incentive package, it can be more quantitative factors like quality-of-life that can lead to a successful attraction effort. Go the extra step, don't always do what you have done. The only one that can make a difference is you as the economic development lead in your community.

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