

## **TBID Trekking Change for Businesses and the Economy in Siskiyou County**

**Everybody has a unique story for getting into this field. Why did you get involved in economic development?**

Economic development was a passion I never knew I had until I started working for the Siskiyou Economic Development Council. Initially, I came on board for some very specific work in the agriculture and food system sector, which is a personal area of interest for me. As soon as I was exposed to the progressive and impactful programs the SEDC was leading, I was ignited to dig in deeper. Since being with the SEDC almost 7 years, I am honored to be a part of a team that is so committed to improving our region's economic prosperity through programs that preserve and promote environmental stewardship and community vitality.

**In your economic development work experience, can you think of a specific economic development project of program that you worked on that stood out as making an impact? Can you tell me a little bit about it and when it started?**

Working as the Program Director for our region's first-ever Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) through its initial formation as well as its first renewal has been critical to the rural economy of Siskiyou. Private business stakeholders (lodging properties and the Mt. Shasta Ski Park) came together with the SEDC to form a self-assessment district to generate long term sustainable funds to promote Siskiyou as a travel destination. Since the formation of the district in 2015, Siskiyou has seen a \$30 million increase in direct travel spending, with half of that growth happening between 2017-2018. The SEDC's commitment to improving the tourism sector will continue to make an impact on tourism-related private businesses as well as put Siskiyou on the map as an ideal place to live, work, and play.

**A lot of projects/programs have ups and downs. Were there challenges you had to overcome to be successful and rewards working on this project/program?**

The reward that comes with building such an important program has also come with challenges. Siskiyou is a rural part of California with nine unique jurisdictions spread over miles of diverse geographic landscapes. By the time Discover Siskiyou was formed (the brand used to market Siskiyou as a travel destination), many of these communities had experienced the challenges of attempting collaborative tourism marketing without sustainable funding and were frustrated and burned out. Working to bring all our communities together in a collaborative, not competitive, way was initially a huge hurdle that required a lot of strategic planning and communication. The results generated from this investment in resources to align our regions have been exciting. The energy felt across Siskiyou in each of our communities continues to build momentum – we can't wait to see what's next!

**Can you share any impacts the project/program has had or will have on employment, expansion of local tax base & diversification of the area's economy?**

Discover Siskiyou entered the market place in 2017 with a fully comprehensive marketing campaign positioned to increase awareness of Siskiyou and inspire travel to this mountainous region of California. While many factors impact lodging occupancy, Siskiyou is picking up steam and our lodging partners are seeing year-over-year increases with Summer 2019 being one of the busiest yet. In addition to general increases in revenues to private businesses, we have several key new lodging business owners, new lodging business opening, and plans for conference centers. Siskiyou has experienced an overall \$30 million increase in direct traveler spending (Dean Runyan Associates) as well as Travel Occupancy Tax revenue increases across all jurisdictions.

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

Let the private business stakeholders lead. Tourism is a critical part of the economy and lodging businesses know this more than anyone and it is their energy and desire to create a self-assessment district that is going to bring a new district to fruition. That being said, it is the role of the economic development teams to connect resources and provide leadership to facilitate communications with city and county officials and the broader community. There is a long learning curve to understanding the operations of a TBID and perhaps even longer curve to “prove it” so never underestimate the need for a comprehensive communications strategy that includes community stakeholders, businesses, and elected officials.

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