

Auburn receives DED recertification

**(LINCOLN, NEB.) — The State of Nebraska has recognized the City of Auburn (pop. 3,307) for ongoing development within the community’s business, education and housing sectors. This week, the Department of Economic Development (DED) announced the City’s recertification in Nebraska’s Economic Development Certified Community (EDCC) program.**

**Auburn is one of 40 Nebraska communities to earn membership in the EDCC program, sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and administered by DED. State officials established the program in 2005 to recognize communities for preparedness to attract new industries and efforts to grow existing businesses. As part of the certification process, qualifying communities must identify a well-defined program that actively engages with their current business community and offers a supportive environment for welcoming new economic development projects. This includes documenting available sites and buildings, local financing and incentive programs and a strategic plan for economic development. The City of Auburn was among Nebraska’s first communities to earn EDCC status in May 2006. The City was recertified in December 2009, June 2015 and November 2020.**

**Over the past five years, local leaders have created new economic and employment opportunities through successful business recruitment efforts. Collaboration between the Auburn Development Council (ADC) and City officials resulted in a Minnesota-based manufacturing company’s expansion project in 2018. FAST Global Solutions acquired its second Nebraska facility at Auburn’s former Ariens Company manufacturing site just 90 days after the Ariens closure. FAST Global Solutions established its first Nebraska plant in Falls City in 1989. Both facilities produce air ground support equipment, conveyors and agricultural sprayers.**

**ADC’s continued commitment to economic vitality led to the creation of various programs to support Auburn’s retail and tourism industries in response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The organization’s Double Down Gift Card Program encouraged gift card purchases at restaurants, retailers and salons by providing matching funds for 18 local businesses. Additional support for the program came from local investors, which created a total of \$3,500 for disaster relief funding. Two area businesses have been awarded grants from the relief fund since its recent inception.**

**“Local support for businesses has always been a key component to success in Nebraska’s small communities, and has proven even more essential in 2020,” said**

**Nebraska Diplomats President Tim O'Brien. "Auburn Development Council's recent programs have incentivized shoppers to invest in the area's retail, hospitality and personal care industries during the pandemic. In addition, disaster relief funding encouraged support for Auburn's entire business community, which highlights ADC's ongoing commitment to stabilization and growth."**

**Six new businesses have opened in Auburn over the past nine months, including two restaurants, a nutrition juice shop, a clothing boutique, a coffee roasting business and a coffee shop. Over the past five years, ADC has hosted business plan workshops facilitated by the Nebraska Center for Rural Affairs' Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP).**

**"Auburn's attractive business climate goes hand in hand with our community's amenities," said ADC Director Kim Beger. "When it comes to an investor's decision to become a business owner, so much of that is about quality of life. As a family-oriented community, we have great schools and access to healthcare, jobs and fiber capabilities."**

**Creativity spurred by the 2018 Nemaha County Leadership class led to Auburn's "Honeybees in the Heartland" project, which celebrates Nebraska's state insect. The project supported the creation of dozens of outdoor community art sculptures, which were showcased on the Nebraska Tourism Commission's 2020 Nebraska Passport program. The sculptures featured Auburn as one of 70 passport stops across Nebraska.**

**Auburn's Rural Institute Fellows program offers paid student internships and specializes in leadership development training via the University of Nebraska's Rural Prosperity Nebraska program. ADC hired two students in 2020 and offered specific training with an Auburn digital marketing company, Bcom Solutions, and the community's Rural Impact Hub. The hub was generated by Bcom ownership and serves as a collaborative space for economic development efforts, workshops and community activities.**

**Rural Impact Hub leaders recently partnered with Auburn Public Schools and Peru State College to host a coding camp for 20 local elementary students. An additional partnership between Auburn Public Schools and the Nebraska Department of Labor resulted in "Explore It" sessions to connect students to local employers. The event provided information about workforce needs and in-demand skill sets in southeast Nebraska for nine area schools. In addition, local junior and senior high school students participate in annual Manufacturing Day events hosted by FAST Global Solutions, Magnolia Metal Corp. and ADC.**

**The City of Auburn continues to build housing opportunities through a DED Owner Occupied Rehabilitation grant, which was awarded to the community in**

**2019. The City is also one of five communities in Nebraska's Rural Workforce Housing Consortium in collaboration with the State of Nebraska, Southeast Nebraska Development District, the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, the Village of Deshler and the Cities of Auburn, Beatrice, Fairbury and Geneva. The City of Auburn also offers several local housing incentives, including grant and loan housing rehabilitation programs and a new house construction grant.**

**The City continues to benefit from a 2014 DED Community Development Block Grant for Downtown Revitalization. The City of Auburn has since completed eight reuse projects totaling more than \$150,000.**

**“As you can see, a bold vision and proactive approach to economic development are crucial to the long-term health and durability of Auburn's economy,” said ADC President Leslie Clark. “We look forward to these next several years with the utmost confidence because we at Auburn Development Council are committed to that approach and seeing that vision for Auburn become a reality.”**

Many Signals Communications