

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PCDA PROGRAM SPURS JOB GROWTH IN PONCA CITY

The Business Retention and Expansion, or BR&E developed by the Ponca City Development Authority (PCDA), has been instrumental in the creation of 3,295 new jobs in Ponca City since it began in 2003, according to PCDA documentation. That figure represents more than 60% of the 4,991 new jobs created through PCDA over the same time period. The program was featured this week at a statewide conference sponsored by Select Oklahoma, an association of state agencies, local economic development organizations, and others involved in economic development.

“PCDA was formed to make job growth happen,” said PCDA Executive Director David Myers. “Our job is not limited to making big announcements, the kind that you get when a new company moves into town. PCDA’s mission is job and wage growth and the data is clear that the highest potential for that comes from working with companies that are smart enough to be here in the first place. Communities miss a lot opportunity to create new jobs and to improve the lives of Ponca City residents if they are just focusing on recruiting new companies. We certainly do that too but we’re not going to ignore where the highest potential for job growth is.”

BR&E programs can offer a number of different methods to stimulate job growth, said Laurence Beliel, PCDA’s Director of Business Retention and Expansion. “When a company tells us of a challenge or an opportunity, we take a look at that to see if there is a way that we can make that happen.”

Three different PCDA BR&E programs have received international awards of excellence in economic development from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). They are the Trade Show Brigade, the Lighten the Load program and the Industry Certification Assistance Program, or ICAP. All three programs have been individually honored by presentations at international conferences which highlight the details of each program.

ICAP provides both an incentive and assistance to companies seeking to gain industry certifications. “It’s really important for companies to be certified in a number of ways whether that is an ISO certification of something more industry specific,” Beliel said. “With the huge changes to the supply chain, you almost have to have some of these certifications to get new contracts and build more jobs,”

he added. ICAP provides an incentive of up to \$6,000, or 50% whichever is less, towards the cost of the audit necessary to get certified in industry specific certifications. PCDA also provides the technical assistance needed to help a company get set up for that audit.

The Trade Show Brigade sponsors local companies at industry trade shows where they can meet new customers. “This helps our local companies diversify in different industries,” Beliel said, adding that “We have seen a significant amount of new local business as a result of this program.” The Trade Show Brigade completed its tenth such event in March when five companies were sponsored by PCDA to attend the Design 2 Part Trade Show in Texas.

Beliel said that BR&E programs come from listening to local industry. “My job is to be there with our local companies, to look for connections, to respond to their opportunities and to be ready if there is a challenge. A few years back, we heard from several that energy efficiency was an issue so we developed the Lighten the Load program. Lighten the Load matched local companies with lighting experts and local utilities to install energy efficient lighting to reduce the cost of operations and make the plans more competitive. “We were fortunate that First National Bank stepped forward to provide the financing so that the program essentially was not cost to our companies,” Beliel said. To date 15 different Ponca City companies have participated.

The three nationally recognized programs are in addition to ongoing BR&E services. These services include connecting local companies to keep as much work local as possible. “There is great opportunity when companies realize what we have right down the street. This has turned into some really exciting new projects involving cutting edge work in emerging industries, the kind of work that will shape the future of Ponca City,” Beliel said.

“Economic development is about so much more than new company announcements,” Myers added. “We made a decision a long time ago that we already had some of the best and brightest companies right here in Ponca City and that we could partner with them to build the jobs we need. The wonderful irony of all of this is that working with them has not only resulted in strong job growth, it has also attracted new companies. The fact that we are at full employment in Ponca City today is no accident. The work of making sure that continues tomorrow is what PCDA works on every day,” he added.