

SouthGrow awards honour local success stories

By **DAVE MABELL**

Lethbridge Herald

Nearly a dozen success stories were celebrated Thursday, during a first-time awards evening for the SouthGrow Regional Initiative.

Four projects were singled out as winners, including one which had met success earlier that day. Blood Tribe Economic Development announced a deal Thursday with modular home builder Morgan USA, creating about 50 jobs in the Stand Off area.

The Village of Nobleford's self-developed subdivision, adding about 120 families to the growing community, was another award winner. So were an agricultural supply company in Mossleigh and a major employee recruitment initiative last year in which organizations from Lethbridge to Taber joined forces.

"We actually just signed the agreement today," beamed Rob Crow, speaking for the Bloods' economic development team. It will see manufacturing resume in a band-owned building which has sat idle since 1990.

SouthGrow's award program was also designed to salute effective collaboration, and the region's "Grow Ahead — Opportunities for a Better Living" hiring initiative in Ontario last year was the first to be recognized for excellence in partnership. That campaign, sparked by Economic Development Lethbridge, also involved the city along with Community Futures Chinook and the MD and Town of Taber as well as the Taber Chamber of

Commerce.

Accepting the award, Cheryl Dick said EDL believes a stronger city makes for a stronger region — and vice versa. She praised the efforts SouthGrow has made in working with communities around the region.

"SouthGrow has been a plus for all of us," added Dick, executive director of the Lethbridge agency.

Nobleford programs or companies were represented in no less than six of the night's 11 citations. Apart from the 45-acre residential subdivision recently developed by village staff, the community's administration and council were recognized for their collaboration with the County of Lethbridge in improving emergency services in the area and for co-operating with neighbouring Barons in building in a secure water connection to Lethbridge.

As well, Ag Tech Manufacturing of Nobleford was cited for its excellence in business retention, a category topped by B&B Ag Service of Mossleigh. And the Edwards Group, a division of Ag Growth Industries, was also recognized hours after its Twister division — recently moved to Nobleford from Calgary — shipped its first products to Australia.

Recognition for two projects also went to Cardston, where the town and county recently concluded an inter-municipal development plan, and where they also collaborated on a "Heart of the SouthWest" business and tourism marketing plan.

EXCELLENCE IN INVESTMENT/BUSINESS ATTRACTION AWARD

Eligibility: MUNICIPALITIES who can describe efforts taken to attract business or investment in their community and who can provide examples of the results of attraction efforts are eligible for this award.

Blood Tribe Economic Development

The Blood Tribe has been working towards attracting a US based modular manufacturer which currently operates 5 plants in the southern US and is looking towards Canadian expansion to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the oil fields. The project involves the retrofit of Kainai Industries Building, an 80,000 sq feet facility which was built in 1969 and used for housing manufacturing. The building has not been used for manufacturing since closing in 1990.

Village of Nobleford

The Village became its own land developer of 45 acres and built affordable properties including 121 residential lots and various sizes of commercial lots. The Village sold all residential properties and has since worked with Edwards Group/Ag Growth to retain and expand the company as well as attract Twister Pipe Ltd from Calgary. The Village plans on continuing the growth and prosperity for its residents.

EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS RETENTION AWARD

Eligibility: MUNICIPALITIES or COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS who can describe efforts taken to retain businesses within the SouthGrow region are eligible for this award.

Agri Tech Manufacturing

Agri Tech Manufacturing has taken several dramatic steps in recent years to maintain and strengthen the viability of the company in spite of low profits in the agricultural industry, including diversification into recreational equipment, contracting work for the oil patch and participating in foreign worker recruitment and retention programs. Agri Tech has maintained stable employment opportunities for the Community in tough times and prospered with market and product expansion resulting in supporting Nobleford as a stable place to live and work.

B & B Ag Service

In 1981, Monty and Vicki Beagle began a small mechanic's garage business in Arrowwood. Since that time, the company has grown into two successful divisions: B & B Ag Service (a company that provides agricultural supplies and services) and B & B Emulsion Hauling (a tanker trucking company created to keep the agriculture trucks and employees busy year round). Coming from farming families, the Beagles created B & B Ag Service to fill the need in the farming community with up to date fertilizer supplies and information. The company began with selling and applying liquid and then dry fertilizer, moved into custom chemical application, later expanded through the purchase of an old P & H Elevator, and now is venturing jointly with Parrish & Heimbecker with a new \$2 million Agriculture Services facility in Mossleigh.

EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS GROWTH/EXPANSION AWARD

Eligibility: MUNICIPALITIES or INDIVIDUAL BUSINESSES who can describe successful business growth or expansion efforts are eligible for this award. Municipalities may have assisted an individual business(es) individual businesses or have taken steps to expand or grow the business. Nominees must show results of the efforts.

Edwards Group, A Division of Ag Growth Industries

In 2005 Edwards Group, owned by Ag Growth Income Fund, met with the Village of Nobleford to discuss the future of the 86,000 sq ft equipment manufacturing facility operation in Nobleford. While initial considerations included possibly closing the newly acquired Nobleford operation and selling off the assets, after significant discussions with the Village, a decision was made to not only continue with current operations but to purchase Twister Pipe Ltd. of Calgary and relocate it to the facility in Nobleford.

Village of Nobleford, Subdivision Development

The Village purchased 45 acres of land and self developed residential, commercial and industrial lots as well as marketed itself to Alberta and beyond. The Village self-financed the project and thereby enabled buyers affordable fully-developed lots.

EXCELLENCE IN COLLABORATION OR PARTNERSHIP AWARD

Eligibility: PARTNER AGENCIES (such as Chambers, CPDCs, etc.), MUNICIPALITIES, and/or BUSINESSES who can show how they collaborated successfully to improve the business/investment/economic development environment.

Community Futures Chinook, Taber Chamber of Commerce, Town of Taber, M.D. of Taber, Economic Development Lethbridge

A regional labour shortage sparked the idea of creating a common brand, marketing campaign, and labour force initiative for the region: "Grow Ahead ~ Opportunities for a better living".

Cardston County and Town of Cardston

The "Heart of the SouthWest" Business Plan was developed jointly by the Town of Cardston and Cardston County, and focused on growth and retention. An initial initiative was a new branding campaign (Heart of the SouthWest), which was created and is currently being used by both municipalities in all marketing initiatives, and has instilled pride in the area.

Cardston and District Economic Development and Tourism Board

The Town and the County worked together to develop an Inter-Municipal Development Plan that would benefit the entire area.

Nobleford/Barons

Municipalities surrounding Nobleford recognized their need for improved water and entered into discussions with Nobleford that resulted in an agreement for Nobleford to provide potable water, via a 16 km long pipeline, that would pass through the County of Lethbridge to the Village of Barons.

Nobleford and District Emergency Services

In 2006, both the County and Village took a bold step forward and asked the question, "Can we do a better job if we collaborate?" and then "Let's partner in areas of mutual benefit and avoid unproductive discussion". The first collaboration was to replace the two fire trucks, with ongoing benefits including reduction in emergency services operation costs, bulking

PARTNERSHIP AWARD

Honourable Mention

**Community Resource Officer
Flagstaff County, Flagstaff Family and Community Services,
Towns of Daysland, Sedgewick, Killam and Hardisty, Villages of
Alliance, Heisler, Galahad, Forestburg, Lougheed, Sirome and Amisk,
Battle River School Division, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse
Commission, Flagstaff Initiative Relationship and Spousal Trauma,
Office of Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying, Persons with
Development Disabilities Program; East Central Health, Enbridge
Pipelines CCS Energy Service, Encana Resources, Flint Hills Resources,
Gibson Energy Partnerships, Terasen Pipelines, Canadian Natural
Resources Ltd, and Husky Energy**

Flagstaff County has adopted an innovative, collaborative strategy to address domestic violence, bullying, drinking and driving, and other community issues. Twenty-six partners from local government, non-profit and business organizations pooled resources to bring in a new community resource officer. Serving all 10 towns and villages in the county, the new officer is spreading a positive influence in the region through prevention, education and support programs. This added presence fosters healthy community relationships and creates a safer, more caring atmosphere for residents.

SMALLER MUNICIPALITIES AWARD

Award Recipient

**Subdivision and Economic Development
Village of Nobleford**

In 2004, with only 600 residents left in the shrinking municipality, the Village of Nobleford took quick, decisive action to inject new life into the community. Through a new sustainability plan, they launched construction of a multi-million dollar water treatment plant, upgraded core infrastructure, encouraged residential development and worked to bring new business to the area. In just over three years, the town has completely turned around. Over 121 new residential-properties have sold and the job market is booming, with 70 new jobs since 2004 and another 50 expected in 2009. The new water treatment plant is providing higher quality water at reduced operating cost, and is currently being doubled in size to provide water to neighbouring municipalities. There is now a sense of optimism with the village on a sustainable footing, and they did it all while actually lowering property taxes.

Honourable Mention

**ICE Villages Group
Village of Irma, Village of Chauvin and Village of Edgerton**

The three villages of Irma, Chauvin and Edgerton (ICE) have combined strengths to enhance municipal service delivery through joint projects, grant applications and shared delivery strategies. With this collaborative foundation in place, the ICE Villages Group is working on an agreement for a regional operators' consortium, which will provide greater support for essential services such as water and wastewater treatment. Through the consortium, each municipality's operators will be trained to operate the other's systems. As an extension of this project, the ICE Villages Group is looking at a joint application for electronic control and online monitoring systems for all three village water plants.