

# The Commission Looks Inward

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by W. Charles Armstrong

It's an odd thing to follow spectacular success with sharp changes. But that is what our state Economic Development Department must do now for the betterment of all Oregonians.

Until now, the Department has always concentrated considerable attention on attracting outside business to the state in order to balance our traditional resource-based industries. Its achievements speak for themselves; Oregon now has a highly diversified economy, with dozens of large investments from overseas and hundreds of high-tech firms. The state no longer has higher unemployment and worse recessions than the rest of the country.

Given these successes, it is time for a new direction. The department needs to shift its attention inward, toward the companies, jobs, and communities already here. We must give first priority to existing businesses--especially in distressed and overlooked corners of our state.

Why should the department move in this new direction? Can we, by doing so, continue to benefit a broad spectrum of working Oregonians?

Good questions. I can answer both by considering another overlooked state resource: the Western Juniper.

In the vast spaces of rural Eastern Oregon, most large landowners consider Juniper a problem. Our state has close to three million acres of Juniper woodlands, and in many cases the woodlands have infringed on prime range habitat and wildlife. Thinning the woodlands is diffi-

cult through harvest and the best stands are a long, costly way from the big Willamette Valley mills. One long-time rancher said it best: "I'm having to pay for my land twice by having to thin Juniper." This financial impact is significant for private land owners and government land managers.

Small wonder that some business people East of the Cascades are striving to

And developing what's in place--in-state--is the key to the department's new direction.

Like the Juniper Project, the department's new direction targets economically distressed corners of the state. The decline of old economies, we've learned, does not mean the decline of the towns and neighborhoods who those businesses supported. The saw mill may close, but the countryside around it doesn't empty. Rather, a lot of those people remain where they have been raised, and without decent work, they not only lose their sense of

worth--the spiritual damage

is always the

worse--but

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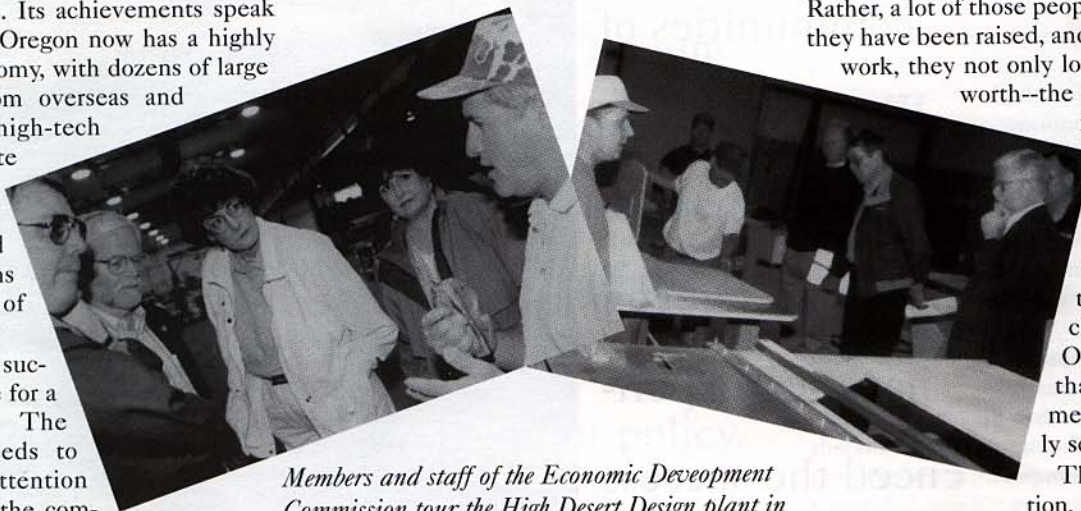
This new direc-

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not mean rejecting all

that is good about Oregon's efforts so far. We will continue to use old tools, but in a more targeted way. We will continue to support economic aspirations in the Willamette Valley, but with more focus on quality of life and better jobs. Outside investments will be focused on rural areas of the state. We know, for instance, that tax incentives for business work, and we intend to keep them available for local use.

Indeed the department's new priority, while in many ways a departure from the past, ultimately calls our department back to its basic mission for the state. We no longer need to work as hard to create more jobs, but rather seek to create better ones: decent, family-supporting jobs, in decent communities, to which people have committed their lives. It is people's lives--the quality of our Oregon life--that most deeply concerns your Economic Development Commission.



Members and staff of the Economic Development Commission tour the High Desert Design plant in Burns, one of the companies they visited in reviewing Oregon's development strategy.

make Juniper into a commercial resource.

"It's the least utilized wood fiber in Oregon," said Larry Swan of the US Forest Service. "And it should be able to support a number of small local companies. But if it were easy, it would have already been done. The types of companies willing to work Juniper need various levels of assistance, ranging from technology to infrastructure."

So the Juniper Utilization Project was developed with funding from the Oregon Economic Development Department. The project helps with multiple aspects of commercialization, ranging from sensitive harvest methods to targeted marketing.

"The project has already created new jobs," said Swan, "and this is an industry still in its infancy."

The Juniper Project develops, rather than depletes, resources already in place.

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