

2013 VACo Achievement Awards Application

FAUQUIER COUNTY: OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

(Category: Community/Economic Development)

Short Overview

Working in conjunction with its business community, Chambers of Commerce, and the state departments of Business Assistance and Economic Development, Fauquier County has produced a DVD entitled: "Fauquier County: Open for Business!" This DVD is geared toward attracting business entrepreneurs to move both their businesses and their families into Fauquier County in order to increase the commercial tax base and foster workforce development. The DVD highlights the incentives and opportunities available for businesses, as well as the unique rural culture, historical significance and feeling of community which make our County great.

Background

Fauquier County is located in the north central Piedmont region of Virginia, approximately 40 miles southwest of the nation's capital and approximately 80 miles northwest of Richmond. The County encompasses a land area of approximately 660 square miles. Fauquier County is bordered by the counties of Prince William, Stafford, Culpeper, Warren, Clarke, Loudoun and Rappahannock. The Rappahannock River forms the county's Western border. Interstate 66 runs East-West through the northern portion of the County. In addition, five U.S. primary routes and two state primary routes traverse the County. The County has a population of 69,000 with a median age of 39, an unemployment rate of 4.6% and a civilian labor force of 38,446.

Statement of the Challenge

During and after the Great Recession, it became readily apparent that Fauquier County, with its beautiful view sheds, wealth of history and agricultural roots, was nevertheless significantly lacking in commercial tax base. The challenge this presented was that the County has been historically “schizophrenic” about what type of commercial growth is consistent with the County’s unique character. The “Don’t Fairfax Fauquier” bumper stickers one sees when traveling the County’s roads are examples of Fauquier’s resistance to being typecast as a part of Northern Virginia and Fauquier’s fear of unbridled growth. The County knew that it wanted commercial growth, but what kind?

Partners and Collaboration

With assistance from the Department of Business Assistance, Fauquier County considered its options. After a series of roundtables and focus groups with the Chambers of Commerce, business groups and local entrepreneurs, it became apparent that business attraction was paramount—but attraction of the *specific kinds* of businesses that would enhance the County’s character and quality of life. Tourism, technology, light manufacturing, government contracting and research and development were targeted. As the County also wanted to address the issue of its enormous (over 75%) out-commuting population, the DVD sought not only to attract entrepreneurs to bring their businesses here, but to bring and raise their families here, create jobs here and take advantage of the County’s exceptional quality of life.

Working with a production company (Advanced Media Solutions), the County set out to create a product that would accomplish several goals:

1. Highlight the County's quality of life, history and sense of community;
2. Showcase the various incentives for business that are available—such as the County's Tourism and Technology Zones, and the Governor's Opportunity Fund;
3. Demonstrate the excellent options for housing, schools and recreation;
4. Let the local business community "speak for itself".

To meet these ends, the County focused on a "homegrown" approach. Local business people were consulted and readily agreed to take part in the project. The DVD features three local business owners—one a realty investor, one a restaurateur, and the third a Chinese manufacturing firm. The Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, a local businessman himself, is also featured. The "helpful County staffers" appearing in the production are actual County employees with whom new business prospects will interact.

Conclusion

"Fauquier County: Open for Business", the finished product, met all these goals and was widely disseminated to the business community, the media, the County's internet web site and the County's government cable channel. It is also regularly used as a promotional medium and is extremely popular with new business prospects. "Fauquier County: Open for Business" is an example of a successful collaboration involving state and local government partners and the local business community.