

Incentives, simpler loans lure businesses, jobs to Taylor

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Bill Brees said that he had enough money to launch a business with his wife but that a bank would not lend him enough to help it grow. Then a bank officer sent him to the Taylor Economic Development Corp. for advice, Brees said, and he walked away with a \$7,000 loan from the corporation that helped him buy a special type of van for their prisoner transportation business.

Now, a month after he was approved for the loan and three months after he started his business, Brees said he's getting calls from all over the United States to pick up fugitives who are wanted on warrants in Texas. He has 14 employees who have transported 160 prisoners, he said.

That is one of a growing number of new and expanding businesses the Taylor Economic Development Corp. has helped since 2008, when it began cutting red tape to get loans to businesses more quickly, said Jason Ford, the president of the corporation.

He said the corporation used to attract two new businesses per year before it revamped its policies; now it attracts four to five businesses a year.

The corporation has helped 15 businesses move or expand in Taylor since 2008, including Wilco Recycling, Eccentrix Technologies, KG Industries and CM Energy, Ford said.

The nine companies the corporation has helped since last year are expected to create more than 130 jobs and spend more than \$32 million in new capital investments in Taylor, Ford said.

The economic development corporation, which started in the 1990s, began collecting more comprehensive information about utilities, the workforce and businesses in Taylor in 2008 to help lure interested businesses to the town of 15,191, Ford said.

In 2010, the corporation started offering incentives to companies interested in Taylor, including grants for businesses that had no revenue yet, he said. The corporation also simplified its loan forms so that a business could receive funding immediately or within three months of filling out an application, instead of the five to six months it was taking, Ford said.

A group of leaders from the city, including the city manager and representatives from the Fire Department and the city's code department, meets weekly to help businesses tackle obstacles such as permitting issues, Ford said.

The corporation just voted to grant Clark Travel and the city \$75,000 to help pay for a wastewater main to the charter bus company's property and other businesses near it, Ford said.

Victoria Clark, vice president of Clark Travel, said the wastewater main offer from the city and the corporation was a big factor in the company's decision to move its offices in Manor and Temple to Taylor.

"We do not have a wastewater line in Manor and are on a septic system, and we have 30 large charter buses that have to use a septic tank," she said.

She said the bus company now has 50 full-time and part-time employees but plans to hire more people once it moves to Taylor. Construction on the company's building will start this month.

Brees, a former nationwide director of operations for the Corrections Corp. of America, said the loan he got from the economic development corporation helped him eventually buy a van with special partitions so his company could move more prisoners and transport men and women at the same time.

"Last week, that van rendered \$15,000 in revenue," Brees said. "It's had a tremendous impact."

Much of his business comes from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, he said.

Ford said Brees will not have to repay the loan because Brees and his wife, Tephania, have made enough local hires to make the loan forgivable.

"That is very impressive. This is another way to diversify the Taylor economy, by adding good jobs in a sector outside of general manufacturing, which has become fiercely competitive on a global basis," Ford said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin