





# Advantage SD helps grow small communities

Huron, S.D. is much more diverse than what you might expect to find in a rural town of about 13,000.

“If you’re going to grow your town in South Dakota today, the only real way to do it is through diversity,” said David McGirr, president and CEO Greater Huron Development Corporation.

Huron’s population has been growing steadily, since a low of about 11,000 in 2015. Much of that growth is because of work done by local companies to recruit employees from outside the area and the state.

Dakota Provisions, a meat processing facility, opened its Huron operations in 2005, with about 300 or 400 employees. Today, Dakota Provisions employs some 1,200 workers in Huron. About 54% of those employees are refugees from Burma and Thailand.

Huron went from 2% of its population being minorities a decade ago to 25% today.

“That had a huge impact on our community,” David said.

NorthWestern Energy worked to support Huron’s changing community by providing grant funds to create an English language program for the new residents and programs to help both refugees and longtime Huron residents understand each other’s cultures.

Funding for the cultural and language programs came from Advantage South Dakota, which NorthWestern Energy launched in the early 2000s. Advantage South Dakota is an economic development organization focusing on the James River Valley of South Dakota.

When NorthWestern launched Advantage South Dakota, we saw the importance of helping the region and communities we serve grow their economies and attract workers.

“We recognized the importance of collaboration between our company and the various economic development organizations in the James River Valley,” said Rick Edwards, NorthWestern Energy’s director of Community Connections.

“NorthWestern Energy has such a big interest in these areas of South Dakota being economically successful,” said Paul Mantz, Key Account and Economic Development Specialist for NorthWestern.

“We’ve always said, when the tide comes in, all boats

float,” Rick added

In the last two decades, Advantage South Dakota has worked successfully to bring in the tide to eastern South Dakota.

“We’ve seen a lot of good growth in some of these small communities,” Rick said.

Advantage South Dakota is made up of economic development professionals from the communities in the James River Valley, business members and NorthWestern Energy. The organization focuses on three main areas – business attraction, workforce development and workforce recruitment.

Having an organization that includes representatives from all the communities in the region helps small communities combine their limited resources.

“This has really helped regional collaboration,” Paul said.

Advantage South Dakota meets quarterly, but also holds more frequent events, such as Power Hour, a virtual meeting held every other week focusing on something timely going on in the economy.

“Power Hour allows us to share important information with business leaders in those communities,” Rick said.

Advantage South Dakota recently launched a grant program, making a \$5,000 grant available to each community to be used for workforce development and recruitment.

Madison used the grant money to create an English language program for immigrant workers. Yankton created a diversity acclimation program.

“Our local economic developers have told us this program allows them to do things they otherwise would not be able to do individually,” Rick said.

For Huron, Advantage South Dakota has made a huge difference in helping a shrinking community find avenues for growth.

“I have been enriched by an opportunity ... to watch a community completely transform to be vibrant again,” said Terry Nebelsick, superintendent of the Huron Public School District.

For more information on Advantage SD, visit [www.advantagesouthdakota.com](http://www.advantagesouthdakota.com).



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## Everyone counts in the 2020 Census

In March 2020, every household in America will receive a notice to complete the Census online, by phone or by mail. In May, the U.S. Census Bureau will begin following up in person with households that have yet to respond.

It takes just 10 minutes to answer 9 simple questions that will shape investments in your community for the next 10 years.

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