

SUU Government Relations & Regional Services

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CONTACTS: Wesley Curtis, Vice President
Government Relations & Regional Services
435.586.5418
curtis@suu.edu

Paul Husselbee
GR&RS Media Relations
435.865.8556
husselbee@suu.edu

Ed Meyer: Putting people together to 'see what happens'

KANAB — As he represents Southern Utah University in Kane County, Ed Meyer prefers to think of himself as a matchmaker in the complex game of community development.

“What I try to do could best be described as putting the pieces of an economic development jigsaw puzzle together,” he said. “I try to visualize how SUU resources can mesh with the needs of people and businesses in Kane County, and then make introductions.

“Once the pieces of the puzzle are connected, good things happen, and I begin looking for other opportunities for collaboration,” he added. “Truthfully, my role is pretty minor. It’s the ingenuity of the people who are matched with one another that ultimately makes things happen.”

Such modesty is typical of Meyer, said SUU Vice President Wesley Curtis, who has worked with Meyer for more than 30 years on rural and economic development in Utah.

“Ed is a state treasure,” Curtis said. “He’s done more for rural development across this state than I have time to tell you.”

During a wide-ranging career in public service, Meyer helped run economic development programs for five governors, from Scott Matheson to Jon M. Huntsman Jr. As director of Utah rural development programs, Meyer was involved in initiatives all over the state that created jobs and increased the standard of living for rural residents.

One example was one of Governor Leavitt’s signature initiatives, the Utah Smart Site Program. Through the program, more than 1,200 jobs were created by 80 rural companies. The Utah Smart Site Program was recognized by President George W. Bush as the most innovative economic-development initiative in the nation.

Meyer was a key player in creating and implementing dozens of rural initiatives over 25 years of state service. He developed many of the rural incentives still in use today, worked with the Utah State Legislature to fund new small business development centers throughout rural Utah, introduced training that resulted in farm and ranch recreation efforts throughout Utah, and was the founding director of the Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance, which was Utah’s first heritage tourism organization.

Over the past quarter of a century, he has worked with Curtis and SUU Government Relations & Regional Services to support and sustain the Utah Rural Summit, an annual gathering of Utah’s rural leaders entering its 23rd year on the SUU campus in August.

Five years ago, Meyer retired to Kanab, and even that had a purpose.

“My entire career was spent in service to rural Utah, so it was natural that I retire to a rural community,” he said.

— more —

Ed Meyer: Putting people together to see what happens

Page 2

But even in his “retirement,” Meyer stays busy in public service. In addition to serving on the Kanab City Council, he reorganized the Kanab Chamber of Commerce, served on the organizing committee for the Center for Education, Business and the Arts, and operates KE Kanab, a rural consulting firm.

One of Meyer’s most important clients is SUU’s Business Resource Center, which is overseen by the Office of Government Relations & Regional Services headed by his old friend, Wes Curtis.

“When I learned that Ed was moving to Kanab, I knew we’d find a way to take advantage of his ability to further the connection between SUU and the people in Kane County,” Curtis said. “We’re delighted with what Ed is doing for us there.”

Over the past year, Meyer has:

- ◆ represented the BRC by working with nine businesses and advising them on how to meet their needs.
- ◆ facilitated meetings between the SUU College of Science, the College of Education and Best Friends Animal Society relative to veterinary technician training and humane education.
- ◆ worked with faculty and staff in the College of Humanities and Social Science to facilitate the Archeology Field School, a five-week summer course in Kanab and Zion National Park, and the Purple Sage Writers Retreat, a literary workshop scheduled for Oct. 8 and 9 in Kanab.
- ◆ met with representatives of the College of Performing and Visual Arts to facilitate photography field trips in Kane County.
- ◆ worked with Special Collections at SUU’s Gerald R. Sherratt Library to facilitate display of the Historic Photos of Zion Canyon exhibit in Kane County.
- ◆ secured a grant from the Governor’s Office of Economic Development to promote entrepreneur-related activities involving the Chamber of Commerce and the Center for Education, Business and the Arts (CEBA).
- ◆ maintained SUU’s visibility in Kane County by serving as host of the Kanab Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneur Forum.
- ◆ initiated the Idea-to-Industry competition involving fledgling entrepreneurs in Kane County and the Arizona Strip.

Meyer is particularly pleased with the result of his work with the Kane County Entrepreneur Forum and its Idea-to-Industry competition.

“Through the Kanab Entrepreneur Forum, we identify promising entrepreneurs and help them start or improve their own businesses,” he said. “We feel our entrepreneurs will be most success if they are nurtured by business men and women within the community who are supplemented as the need arises by experts from outside Kane County.”

The Idea-to-Industry Competition is just one example of how the entrepreneur forum supports local entrepreneurs, Meyer noted.

“There are other entrepreneur competitions around that are designed to introduce folks with new ideas to potential investors,” he said. “Our competition is different in that we are focused on companies that will provide family-sustaining jobs and that will still be here in 10 years.”

— more —

Ed Meyer: Putting people together to see what happens

Page 3

This year's inaugural competition attracted 14 competitors. The ideas from 14 entries were so good this year that the competition expanded its awards beyond the two first-prize winner who received \$5,000 each as advertised to four runners-up who received \$1,000 each.

One of the winners was Jacob Cluff of Fredonia, Ariz., who produces pre-fabricated "puzzle buildings" to be stapled together like a jigsaw puzzle and used as temporary shelters in disaster-stricken areas overseas.

Cluff, a former cabinetmaker and finish carpenter, came up with the design after new construction slowed during the recent economic downturn. He said he plans to use his \$5,000 prize money for video production and marketing tools.

The other first-prize winner was Dustin Pederson, co-owner of Techies, in Kanab. In the next few weeks, Pederson will be releasing a social-media internet site based loosely on Facebook's hugely successful Farm Town model.

Other prize-winners in the competition created viable business options that include the following:

- ◆ a documentary video production center in Kanab.
- ◆ an online marketing site for artists.
- ◆ furniture designed to blend with the Southwest Utah landscape.
- ◆ a themed restaurant in Fredonia.

In addition to the professional competition, Idea-to-Industry also awarded two \$1,000 prizes to high school students for their ideas (a video production company and a bicycle shop).

The best part of the competition, Meyer said, is that these the ideas have surfaced, and the Kane County Entrepreneur Forum has 14 new fledgling entrepreneurs to advise and assist.

— 30 —

Mugshot of Ed Meyer attached