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State bolsters job creation, business expansion in Ames

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State of Iowa assistance to help local industry expand and create new jobs is at work at several Ames locations.

Among the most recent examples are AgLeader Technologies, Phasient Learning Center and Colorbiotics, according to Dan Culhane, president and CEO of the Ames Chamber of Commerce and Ames Economic Development Commission.

Colorbiotics, a division of Becker-Underwood, built a 140,000-square-foot plant on North Dayton Avenue last year. AgLeader added nearly 100,000 square feet to its location near the corner of Airport Road and Riverside Drive, while Phasient moved to a larger location in a business park across from Des Moines Area Community College's Career Academy/Hunziker Center, near U.S. Highway 30 and Interstate 35.

New jobs were added in each case, according to company representatives.

"Grow Iowa has been very productive in Ames even with changing economic conditions," Culhane said. "It's been most effective when local companies have sister operations elsewhere, and the parent company says, 'We need to expand, and we aren't concerned about where, as long as local conditions are favorable.'"

Marketing Ames to new and existing companies is far more than financial incentives, he said.

"Frankly, it's a turnoff when companies that come to us bring up financial incentives early in the process," Culhane said. "And we really don't hear things like that too often.

"What we hear most is (that Ames can offer) a cost effective location, proximity to Iowa State University and a good workforce. Only then do financial incentives come into the conversation."

More Midwestern states are offering tax credits in the past few years, Culhane said.

"If it comes down to a choice, then the company looks at overall costs," he said. "We've been competitive when decisions like that are made, although Iowa isn't the cheapest or most generous with infrastructure or (other) incentives.

"We're selective about the companies we talk to. As far as the city of Ames is concerned, we ask ourselves, what is in everyone's best interest? What quality of jobs will be brought into the community?"

Head-of-household salaries are a criteria for both Ames and for state of Iowa assistance. For example, state assistance is available from the Iowa Department of Economic Development for jobs that exceed the county or regional salary averages.

For applications received from Jan. 1 through March 31, levels of state assistance begin with jobs that pay \$20.26, which is 130 percent of the Story County average (\$15.59). Another level of assistance becomes available when the jobs pay 160 percent of the county average, or \$24.29.

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