

SWINGING FOR THE FENCES FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WINS AND PROGRESS

Last year our community faced a number of difficult economic challenges, ranging from the 737 MAX production suspension to the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on local businesses and families. But, in spite of these challenges, more jobs were created in our region in 2020 than any other year of the Greater Wichita Partnership's history. Project leads significantly increased as well.

2020 Business Growth

15	79	20
PROJECT WINS	NEW PROJECTS	SITE VISITS

Between existing companies working on expansion here and new companies looking to come into our market, we opened a record 79 new projects in 2020. We are still working many of those but we had 15 projects and 20 site visits – both the largest single-year total since our organization started – that announced and chose our region for job creation or capital investment. These are projects across our region and across industries, and importantly, six are businesses that previously did not have a presence in South Central Kansas.

This increase in projects and deal flow is the result of years of work by many people and in many areas, from public policy improvements to developing a regional mindset to increasing global awareness about Wichita and getting our investors better involved in starting conversations with sister companies, customers or supply chain partners. The tactic I want to share with you in this blog post is what I like to describe as our appetite for swinging big.

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Smart economic development demands pursuing projects of all sizes and involving companies ranging from those you've

not yet heard of to those on the list of the world's most recognizable brands. For a lot of reasons, we rarely talk about deals we didn't land, but here are some examples we can share that show how we are aggressively competing for jobs, facilitating investment in the region and collaborating to drive economic growth.



Tesla: Leveraging the legwork done through the Mazda-Toyota process, we quickly acted in 2020 when Elon Musk tweeted about looking for a site for Tesla's Cybertruck Gigafactory. Based on knowledge of Musk, our rapid response included a website and promotional video tailored to his interest in the retro sci-fi genre while highlighting El Dorado as a specific site and touting the benefits our region offers. This public appeal garnered the private interest we wanted resulting in positive conversations about automotive manufacturing in our region before Tesla announced Austin, Texas, as the site for the factory.

U.S. Space Command: Another highly public and competitive project in 2020 was the billion-dollar U.S. Space Command

headquarters. Again, we competed through a regional approach with the Partnership team providing in-depth data and technical expertise and collaborating closely with many regional partners, the cities of Wichita and Derby, Sedgwick County, Wichita State University's National Institute for Aviation Research and the Kansas Department of Commerce to develop a detailed response to the U.S. Department of the Air Force's request for proposals.

Mazda-Toyota: We aggressively went after this 2017 bid after we met the initial criteria for the automotive manufacturing facility to support the new Mazda-Toyota joint venture. As a region, we worked together to identify our combined community assets and collectively determined El Dorado was the best fit for this project's site needs. Our team was then able to amplify the efforts of the economic development staff in Butler County. Even as we competed hard, the Huntsville, Alabama region won the project.

These are just a few examples of the Partnership working across the region and with partners to "swing for the fences." Not every high-profile pursuit ends with a home run, but we benefit from the process and we know it's part of the long game.

Reflecting on these projects, there are a few areas that could enhance our competitive edge against other cities - previously during these processes and in future opportunities. This includes having shovel-ready sites and available "spec" industrial buildings, enhancing our state and local economic development tools for not just the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) but their top-tier supplier manufacturers in tandem as well as an increase in air service to key hub markets for out-of-state and international companies to access their facilities. We recognize many community partners are working on these very things.

Being forward-thinking is how we will win the big projects. Case in point: the 2020 announcement of two Amazon facilities choosing the Greater Wichita region came after four years of regular contact with the world's fifth largest employer.

Just as important in the 2020 win column, though, were deals for Clearwater with two companies not as well known: Plains Cotton Cooperative Association's warehouse and distribution center and Anderson & Forrester's relocation of manufacturing operations from the Denver area.

Our team works aggressively on each prospective deal no matter the size or stature, providing targeted support and information along with coordinating site visits and business retention and expansion (BR&E) calls. This mix is a major reason we saw increased deal flow in a year like 2020.

I invite you to review the Partnership's 2020 Year-End Jobs Update for a complete analysis.

Andrew Nave, Executive Vice President of Economic Development



Chief Economic Development Officer
ANDREW NAVE

(316) 500.6650
andrew@greaterwichitapartnership.org



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