



Annual Report of the Sonoma Valley Economic Development Partnership 2009

The Economic Development Partnership is a collaboration of the **Sonoma Valley Chamber of Commerce**, the **City of Sonoma**, and the **Sonoma County Community Development Commission** to support the local economy.

Guided by a five-member Advisory Committee, the Partnership contracts with a part-time project manager to implement an economic development program and serve as a resource for the business community.

In a year marked by the deepest recession in decades, Sonoma Valley's economy faced significant challenges. Businesses in the City of Sonoma saw an overall decline of 10.5% in taxable sales for the 2009 fiscal year (compared with declines of 13.3% for the Bay Area and 13.6% statewide). A survey by the Chamber in November of 2009 found that half of respondents reported that business was "slightly worse" or "far worse" than in the previous year; about one-fourth report that business was "about the same."

But by **working to achieve common goals**, the Chamber, City, County, and other collaborating organizations have taken important steps to position Sonoma Valley for economic recovery and ongoing vitality. Examples from 2009 include:

- Support for tourism through the installation of new downtown **business wayfinding signage** and improved **parking directional signs**, funded by the City's Community Development Agency (CDA).

- Expansion of the "**Shop Sonoma**" campaign, led by the Chamber with support of the Index-Tribune and Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau. Included this year were a summertime "Downtown Friday Nights" promotion and a holiday promotion with the day after Thanksgiving proclaimed "Shop Sonoma Day" by the City Council. The Partnership coordinated design, purchase and distribution of new "Shop Sonoma" tote bags.



- The first full year of SonomaValley4Biz.com, a "**one stop**" website for business attraction, creation, and retention. Website usage is now at over 1,000 visits by more than 300 unique visitors each month.
- Development of a "Picture Your Business in Sonoma" **business attraction campaign**, including creation of posters for vacant storefronts with the help of the Sonoma Index-Tribune. The posters, which are distributed to commercial leasing agents and property managers, encourage passersby to "Picture Your Business Here" and visit the Partnership's website for

Economic Development Advisory Committee 2009

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*In 2009, Sonoma continued to be recognized for **quality of life** factors that play an important role in business attraction and retention as well as tourism. Sonoma was named a **Solar Champion**, a **Bicycle Friendly Community**, and the first U.S. "Cittaslow" city.*

resources and information. New business attraction print materials were also developed.

- Ongoing participation in efforts to **streamline** the City’s sign ordinance and improve outreach to businesses.
- Hosting of the 3rd annual “**Tops in Sonoma**” event to recognize the valley’s major tax generators and obtain their input on business climate and retention issues.
- Support for existing businesses through locally-provided business **advisory services and workshops** from the Small Business Development Center.
- A partnership with the **Dominican University Green MBA program** to provide assistance by student teams to local businesses seeking green certification. Local business efforts to improve their water and energy efficiency were also aided through free on-site assessments, rebates, and incentives like the City’s “cash for grass” program.



“Tops in Sonoma” Businesses Say...

A 2009 survey of the Valley’s largest tax generating businesses found that:

- *Location, quality of life, and community support are the strengths of doing business in Sonoma.*
- *Almost 70% plan to make energy efficiency improvements in the coming year.*
- *Improved visitor signage, availability of parking, crime prevention, and permit streamlining were identified as areas where local government can best support business success.*

- **Help for new businesses** such as Taylor Maid Farms, whose soon-to-open “Maid at Home” retail location on West Napa St. was aided by provision of a building code analysis and assistance from the City’s CDA loan program.
- Assistance to Friedman’s Home Improvement by the CDA with the costs of public improvements related to the expansion of their Sonoma store. The CDA also **assisted several existing businesses** with loans for energy efficiency and/or other building rehabilitation improvements in 2009, including Sonoma Truck & Auto, MacArthur Place, and Readers Books, and provided matching funds for façade improvements to several others.
- Completion of the first phase of the **Springs Highway 12 project**, with new sidewalks, streetlights, and road improvements, through the ongoing efforts of the Spring Redevelopment Advisory Committee (RAC), staff, and officials of the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC).

- Establishment of a commercial building rehabilitation and façade improvement **loan program for the Springs** Redevelopment Area by the Sonoma County CDC.
- Launch of the **Sonoma County Energy Independence** loan program, to help property owners finance energy and water efficiency improvements and solar projects. Sonoma County was the first county in the California to implement this innovative financing tool.
- Local implementation of the federal stimulus-funded **Youth Summer Jobs** program, administered by the Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board and coordinated locally by Social Advocates for Youth. A total of 33 youth were employed in Sonoma Valley through the program.

2009 Green Business Awards include... *Sonoma Valley Green Business Recognition:* Sonoma Valley Inn, Vintage House, Social Advocates for Youth, Sonoma Hills Retirement Center, Kenwood Oaks Guest House, GeoPraxis Inc., El Dorado Kitchen and Hotel. *Sonoma County/Bay Area Green Business Certification:* Exchange Bank, Worldspeed Motorsports, MacRostie Vineyards and Winery, Sonoma Public Works Corp. Yard, Gundlach Bundschu Winery, Boden Plumbing. *BEA Best Practices Award:* Friedman’s Home Improvement, St. Francis Winery and Vineyards. *Sustainable North Bay Award:* Vode Lighting. Congratulations to all!