

4CED lands \$14K grant to help local businesses

James Fenton, jfenton@daily-times.com 8:19 p.m. MDT March 15, 2016



(Photo: Jon Austria/The Daily Times)

FARMINGTON — The Four Corners Economic Development Foundation received a \$14,000 grant on Tuesday that will help the economic development organization continue its efforts to increase workforce development and training opportunities for people out of work or looking to move into new careers.

Four Corners Community Bank, Bank of the Southwest and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Dallas provided the Partnership Grant Program award.

The grant helps the non-profit economic development organization (<http://4cornersed.com/>) provide training and support to existing small businesses in the area at a time of sharp declines in local oil and gas industry activity caused by slumping crude oil and natural gas prices, said Ray Hagerman, Four Corners Economic Development CEO.

Representatives for U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich and U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Luján joined business and economic development officials at a check presentation event at Cooper Fire Protection Services, Inc. near downtown.

In a statement, Luján said the grant supports efforts to add jobs in San Juan County.

"As the regional economy faces challenges, small business owners are using their entrepreneurial spirit to find innovative solutions, while workers are seeking to learn new skills that will help them get ahead and stay ahead," Luján said.

Cooper Fire Protection Services is one of a group of local small businesses that have sought help from the economic development organization.



From left, Four Corners Economic Development CEO Ray Hagerman, Four Corners Community Bank President and Chief Executive Officer Sheila Mathews and Federal Home Loan Bank of Dallas First Vice-President and Director of Community Investment Greg Hettrick on Tuesday participate in a ceremony at Cooper Fire Protection Services in Farmington. (Photo: Jon Austria/The Daily Times)

Chantel Cooper, the company's vice president, said her family's business received help last year from 4CED's Grow SMART (<http://4cornersed.com/?s=grow+smart&x=0&y=0>) program, which helps small business owners develop strategic action plans.

She said her business, which employs about 30 workers, has diversified in recent years to survive in Farmington, which is hampered by its geographic isolation as much as its heavy reliance on the oil and gas industry.

"One of the things we've done, particularly in this area, in order to be successful here is that most fire-sprinkler contractors are just fire-sprinkler contractors," Cooper said. "But here we have an in-house design team, in-house fabrication, a supply warehouse, and inspection and service teams."

The business also trains its own workers, she said.

"In this area, you can't just go out on the street and hire a journeyman fire-sprinkler installer," she said, "so we have a four-year, accredited training program where we literally grow our journeymen."

Hagerman said small businesses like Cooper Fire Protection Services show a willingness to adapt with the times and face regional challenges with creative solutions, a push he said he believes 4CED will continue to deliver in the area.

"We are going to use this toward really enhancing small businesses in the community," Hagerman said. "We know that the businesses that are already here are the cornerstone of all economic development activities, and to that extent we can use (the grant) for (employee) trainings, for workforce development, for strategic planning and to assist them in customer acquisitions. The more they learn the more they diversify themselves, the more markets they get into, then the better off we are as a community."

James Fenton is the business editor of The Daily Times. He can be reached at 505-564-4621.

Read or Share this story: <http://www.daily-times.com/story/news/local/farmington/2016/03/15/4ced-lands-14k-grant-help-local-businesses/81806558/>