

Sitka Economic Development Association

Improving the Quality of Life in Sitka

The Sitka Economic Development Association (SEDA) is a small nonprofit organization with a monumental mission. Its goal is to foster a business climate that is receptive and conducive to existing and new business; to help promote the creation of family wage jobs; and to enhance the quality of life for Sitkans.

It's a major challenge for a two-person operation in a community that has lost more than 500 good-paying, year-round jobs over the past two decades. For example, Alaska Pulp Corp. closed in 1993, eliminating more than 400 jobs that accounted for 25 percent of Sitka's annual payroll. In 1997, a Greater Sitka Chamber of Commerce committee established SEDA to guide Sitka's economy in a more positive direction.

Since then, the association has been busy creating the infrastructure to transform the defunct pulp mill into Sawmill Cove Industrial Park (SCIP). SEDA has been instrumental in generating more than \$11 million in public funds for the improvement of SCIP. "It wasn't us alone; it was us helping policy makers make those decisions," said Executive Director Garry White.

SCIP is the largest piece of commercial/industrial property available for development in Sitka. The 75-acre park—owned by the city of Sitka and managed by SEDA—has undergone a number of enhancements since 1999, including the removal of hazardous waste, upgrades to the administration building, the platting of core lots, the construction of a raw/bulk water pipeline and the paving of main roadways. Today, SCIP is home to



View from above Sitka, with Mt. Edgecumbe in distance.

Silver Bay Seafoods and Sitka Bike & Hike, which employ up to 250 people combined.

Other tenants include the Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association hatchery site, True Alaska Bottling, Fortress of the Bear, Monarch Tannery, Audio Workshop and Childsong Dolls.

Under its broader efforts, SEDA also focuses on promoting Sitka as a viable place to do business, live and visit. Sitka has the largest harbor system in Alaska, with five harbors and more than 2,000 registered boats. With an ice-free deep water port, the city is located on the Great Circle Route for easy access to Pacific Rim commerce. "We're only 237 nautical miles from the Port of Prince Rupert, which is becoming one of the largest freight zones in North America," White said.

Sitka's airport receives 737 jet service from Seattle, Anchorage and Juneau and is currently expanding its runway. The city qualifies as a Historically Underutilized Business Zone, which allows advantages for government contractors. Sitka also has a University of Alaska campus and two hospitals, which is unusual for a community of 9,000.

In addition, Sitka has been working through SEDA to develop natural resources, such as forestry products, hydro-electricity and fresh water. The city has contracted True Alaska Bottling to export water from Blue Lake, which has generated quite a buzz. "We were on CNBC last year, and I've had contact with people from the Netherlands, Kuwait and Africa," White said.

Perhaps Sitka's most valuable resources are its beauty and quality of life, which have been nationally-recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Mother Earth Earth News, Outside Magazine and National Geographic Traveler. "I think that's why a lot of folks stay here," White said.



Sawmill Cove Industrial Park
www.sawmillcove.com

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75 Acres Waterfront Industrial Property
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For more information contact

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