

Economic Focus



GRAND JUNCTION economic PARTNERSHIP

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A monthly update of economic development issues provided by the Grand Junction Economic Partnership

Tourism impacts & improves everyone's quality of life

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They come to play baseball, ride bicycles, play golf, tour and hike Colorado National Monument, go on a dinosaur dig, raft the Colorado River, show horses, watch baseball, tour wineries, buy peaches, play soccer, play lacrosse, participate in Special Olympics, Senior Games or some other organized sports tournament, go to a concert, visit our interesting downtown, compete in a barbecue competition, watch a bike race, go to a rodeo, go to a festival, ski, play disc golf, ride motorcycles or participate in some other event or activity.

There isn't just one reason tourists come to Mesa County, and there isn't just one season when tourists come to the county, either. While the number of tourists may swell in the summer travel season, spring and fall are the best seasons for some activities. Powderhorn may not draw as many out-of-area visitors as Aspen, but it does attract a few tourists and some visitors who are headed up-valley end up flying into Grand Junction in the winter, which adds to the area's winter tourism business.

Unlike some tourist destinations that have one big event that draws tourists to overwhelm the town like a horde of locusts for a short period of time or other tourist destinations that focus on one major activity, the tourism industry here is steady, varied and multi-layered, drawing visitors to Fruita, Grand Junction and Palisade.

Going strictly by the numbers, about 3.7 percent of the population in Mesa County is supported directly or indirectly by the tourism industry, based on the 2015 population of 148,513 and the 5,566 jobs reported by the 2016 tourism economic impact study.

Those numbers, however, don't tell the complete story. Tourism boosts everyone's quality of life in Mesa County, even those whose jobs don't revolve around heads and beds.

The local high schools and Colorado Mesa University all share an incredible stadium for sporting events, thanks in part to the Grand Valley's long-time favorite sports tourism event, JUCO.

"We built the stadium over the last 50 years," said JUCO director Jamie Hamilton. "We did an \$8.3 million remodel without assessing a tax."

The Grand Junction Rockies baseball team relocated here for various reasons, but having Stocker Stadium ready and available certainly added to the Grand Valley's appeal, so residents now get to enjoy minor league baseball.

"JUCO put the initial \$100,000 into artificial turf for football," Hamilton said. "We went to the Denver Broncos, who gave us \$50,000 and sent us to NFL charities. They were impressed because they'd never seen a baseball group pay for football."

Here in the Grand Valley, sports-related tourism is huge, which makes sense because it's a great place to enjoy many different sports. Tourists come to enjoy activities that the locals are already passionate about and participate in on a regular basis. Canyon View Park is a huge draw for tourists who come to play in sports tournaments, and according to industry reports, the average household spending for an amateur sporting trip (like the ones hosted at Canyon View) is more than \$700 per family.

"A big piece of tourism for Fruita is the small businesses," said Mike Bennett, city manager for Fruita, which is happy to welcome mountain bikers from all over the world. "Visitors feel like locals and locals feel like visitors. When you come here, you don't feel like you're in a tourist town."

The same could be said for Palisade, which is a huge part of its appeal.

"Palisade has gotten a reputation as a true farmers' market," said Rich Sales, Palisade town administrator. "People like to come here and get locally grown food."

Of course, the biggest locally grown food in Palisade is peaches, which adds up to about \$65 million per year. While the brewery and distillery in Palisade serve a lot of locals, both have become stopping points for tourists who come to the town.

Palisade doesn't have many restaurants; it is, after all, a small farming town rather than a true tourist town, but it's the tourist dollars that keep the restaurants in business. A good summer tourist season can prevent starvation in the winter. That's one of the biggest reasons the town has so enthusiastically embraced the Cameo sports shooting complex; it will bring tourists to the town year-round, not just during the growing season.

Thanks to tourists, who account for about 45 to 50 percent of the golfers, locals get to play Redlands Mesa Golf Course, which is consistently rated as one of the top public golf courses in Colorado.

Thanks to tourism, locals can enjoy limousine rides through the wineries, fine dining in an orchard, fine dining at many local restaurants, lots of spring and summertime festivals in various parks and venues celebrating everything from headless chickens to wine, lavender and

peaches. Because tourists go to the dinosaur digs sponsored by the Dinosaur Journey at the Museums of Western Colorado, locals can also become citizen scientists and take part in searching for bones in one of the few scientific quarries in the country that's open to the public. Because tourists support Rimrock Adventures, locals can enjoy weekly rodeos or go on a raft trip down the Colorado, Gunnison or Dolores River.

With all of the natural outdoor amenities that surround the communities, there are plenty of residents who see no reason for an indoor event center, especially given the community's desire for a recreation center.

The city hopes the majority of residents will see the benefits that a downtown events center could bring to the community and understand that it's not a choice between either/or. While the city is hoping residents will approve the events center, it's also making plans for a recreation center at Matchett Park. An event center and a community center are not mutually exclusive propositions.

"At its core, an events center is an economic development tool," said Greg Caton, city manager for the city of Grand Junction. "It's a mini Pepsi Center."

According to Caton, Grand Junction is no longer the place where residents of other small towns on the Western Slope come to shop because they now have more shopping options in their towns, as well as the option to shop online.

"We are still a regional draw for healthcare and for entertainment, and this will help the community transition from a retail hub to an entertainment hub."

The events center and remodel of Two Rivers Convention Center would help Two Rivers attract more convention business, which adds to the number of tourists who come to town, which adds to the tax dollars collected by the city, as well as adding to the bottom line of downtown businesses that offer goods and services to both tourists and residents.

"When you put a public facility in the right place, it generate private money," Caton said, adding that the cost is projected to be about \$30 per person annually, which would have a \$30 million economic impact.

Perhaps the best and most unique aspect about the Grand Valley's tourism industry is that tourists and residents both come for one or two reasons, and end up staying longer or coming back because of all the other places to go and things to do.

How exactly does GJEP help a business?

GJEP offers several free services to businesses interested in relocating to Mesa County, as well as companies that are already here but looking to expand. We can provide economic impact analyses, assist with the site selection process and navigate grants, incentives and other financial options to facilitate the move. We also work closely with our city councils, elected officials and other economic development entities on in support of our clients.

How do I refer a business?

You can give GJEP a call at 970-245-4332 or fill out a contact form on gjep.org/spreadthelove. Online, you'll also find more information about the campaign including the terms and conditions. Thank you for spreading the love!

This month, the Grand Junction Economic Partnership (GJEP) launched "Spread the Love," a referral campaign that rewards a local community member who connects GJEP with a business interested in relocation or expansion in Mesa County. Any community member who refers an eligible business to GJEP between now and November 30, 2017, will be entered into a drawing for a \$1,000 cash prize.

Why launch "Spread the Love"?

GJEP meets over a quarter of our business prospects through referrals, but we would like to see that number increase. Locals are the best ambassadors for the Grand Valley, as they have a genuine love for our area and desire to see it grow. If a local has referred a business to GJEP, we know part of the work has already been done, in terms of selling that business on what's great about where we live. Now GJEP just has to help the business manage the logistics.

