

INL and Boise State come

Arco Advertiser
Arco, ID
March 16, 2017
Section B, Page 1
1 of 3



The Experimental Breeder Reactor-1 Museum is one of the tourist attractions that will be featured on a new Butte County website being constructed as a result of a partnership between Idaho National Laboratory and Boise State University.

By Corey Taule

Butte County has historically been – and likely will remain – one of Idaho's least populated places. Those hardy folks who call towns such as Moore, Arco, Howe, Butte City and Darlington home do so for a reason. They like a little elbow room.

And yet, folks in Butte County understand they need a stable and growing economy: new businesses coming in and old ones continuing to prosper. They want a place attractive to visitors. The idea, of course, is to create something solid enough to provide a foundation for their children and grandchildren so they too might make a living and raise their families in the shadow of Big Southern Butte.

They've watched over the past four decades as Butte County's population has slowly but steadily declined, from 3,342 in 1980 to 2,622 in 2014, according to Census Bureau data.

The question then, is how does a place such as Butte County prosper without losing what makes it unique?

Spend time in this remote 2,232 square-mile county and you come to understand something. There is a great spirit to this place, a real sense of community pride. These folks are in this together, and prefer to do for themselves. Give them tools and they will build.

That's precisely what a partnership between Idaho National Laboratory and Boise State University intends to accomplish.

Every year, INL contractor Battelle Energy Alliance (BEA) awards thousands of dollars in technology-based economic development grants throughout Idaho. Recently, INL gave \$17,500 – one of the largest grant awards of 2017 – to help BSU's Idaho Policy Institute implement three projects.

All have one thing in common: When the grant money is gone and the academics are back in Boise, the folks in Butte County will have more of the skills and tools they need to prosper.

"That's what I really like about this project," said Amy Lientz, INL's director of partnerships, engagement and technology deployment. "It promotes economic development, entrepreneurship and innovation in a way that fits the people in Butte County and will continue to serve them for many years."

Project No. 1

A major challenge for small, rural communities in a world changing rapidly is local business: supporting those already in existence and helping create an atmosphere in which new companies can not only survive, but thrive. The key is information and adaptation.

This spring, BSU's director of economic development, Cece Gas-

ner, will travel to Arco and teach entrepreneurial skills to anyone interested, from local business owners to folks who would follow in their footsteps. Monica Hampton, Butte County's economic development director, said she anticipates an all-of-the-above effort, a "holistic approach," that encompasses leadership skills and strategic strategies that can make or break a fledgling enterprise.

Best of all, Hampton said, this will not be a one-time event.

"They'll train me, and then I can continue that education," she said.

Project No. 2

Imagine you're from South Carolina or New Hampshire or Italy ... anywhere far away enough from eastern Idaho to lack familiarity with the area. This is, of course, one of the best places from which to view this summer's solar eclipse. That piques your interest and you plan an outing.

Beyond the eclipse, you're looking forward to hitting the region's highlights: Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, Craters of the Moon and, if perchance you are among the 19 percent of Americans who receive electricity as a result of nuclear power, the Experimental Breeder Reactor-1 Museum.

You want to know more about the communities between EBR-1 and Craters of the Moon, a nice motel and well-reviewed local eatery, for instance. So, you Google "Butte County" and find yourself reading about the cities of Biggs, Chicó and Paradise, hotels in the Sacramento area and a construction update on Oregon Gulch Road Bridge across Morris Ravine.

Yes, this Butte County is in California. And no, Idaho's Butte County doesn't have its own website to direct visitors to comfy motels, charming restaurants or places of interest, such as the county's many ATV trails, hiking at Big Southern Butte, mountain climbing at Diamond Peak or to examine the mysteries of the Big and Little Lost Rivers, which sink into the Snake River Plain.

That, however, is changing.

together in Butte County

BSU's technical staff for this project, which consists of one faculty member and a student assistant, is building a website for the county. The goal, Hampton said, is not only to offer potential visitors a place from which to begin, but also to use this space to market existing businesses and encourage startups.

"We are trying to bring more tourists here," Hampton said. "But as a region, we do need to make sure we continue to do a good job working together."

Project No. 3

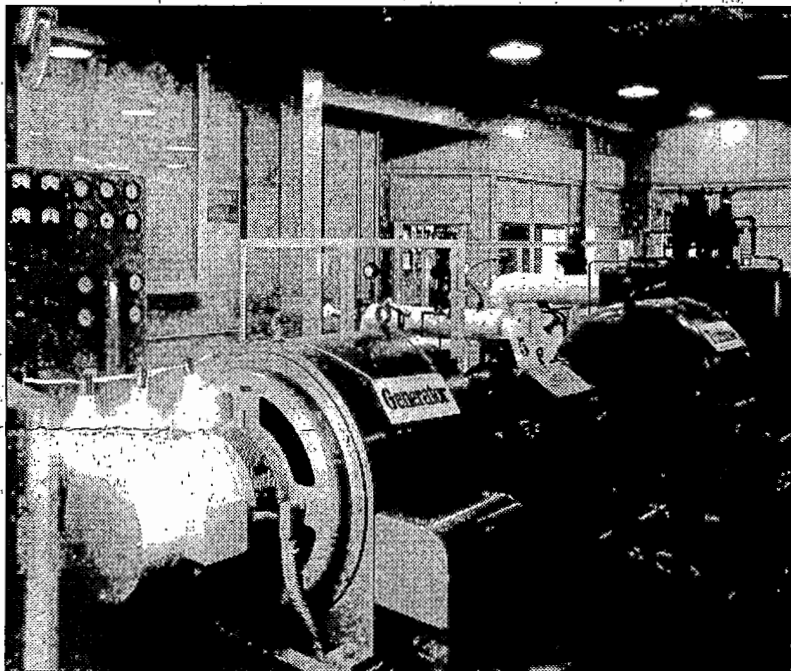
Somebody starts a new business. An interested customer finds it on the new website and decides the product is worth driving to Arco. What do you want them to see when they pull into town? The answer, if you're Butte County, Idaho, is a friendly and approachable place with a beautification effort that showcases the community's unique relationship to atomic energy.

The highlight of that relationship occurred on July 17, 1955 when INL's BORAX III reactor made Arco the world's first community to be powered by nuclear fission.

Hampton, who grew up in the area and recently returned to head its economic development effort, emphasized that the project must showcase Butte County's pride in its history, and proximity to the nation's lead nuclear research and development laboratory.

But how does one do that?

Perhaps in a series of art projects throughout the county seat, Arco, similar to the imaginative benches one will find in Idaho Falls, only with a scientific theme. Or on plaques throughout town commemorating the people and places that have helped develop the energy source that provides 63 percent of this nation's carbon-free electricity. Murals could be created and displayed throughout Arco. The possi-



Butte County, with help from Idaho National Laboratory and Boise State University, has begun a beautification project that celebrates the community's historic ties to atomic energy.

bilities are endless and will, in the end, be determined, appropriately, by members of the community.

"The more we talked, the more we thought the best way to get community support and buy-in to this effort was to find somebody local to do the art piece," said Greg Hill, director of BSU's Idaho Policy Institute.

Hampton said this part of the Butte County/INL/BSU three-legged stool isn't just about titillating tourists. Too often, in striving for bigger and better, we forget about the here and now — those people we started off talking about in the beginning, these hardy folks who have for generations called the Lost River Valley home and aren't planning to leave anytime soon.

"This is a good place to live," Hampton said. "Not only is it scenic, we have wonderful people who live here and contribute to our community. We want to make the good even better, not only for visitors, but ourselves."

Reasons for doing

Battelle Energy Alliance is a nearly 100-year-old Ohio-based nonprofit formed to improve the world through scientific achievement and the accumulation of knowledge.

Butte County is not the only place in Idaho benefiting from BEA technology-based economic development grants this year. Projects are also taking place in the Wood River Valley, Clearwater Basin and Panhandle.

By engaging directly in communities such as Arco, Orofino, Ketchum and Coeur d'Alene, INL increases its visibility and is able to connect economic development efforts to INL's mission areas.

"We work hard to make sure every dollar we give makes a difference," said Stephanie Cook, INL's program manager for economic and workforce development.

Thirty percent of INL's workforce is at least 50 years of age, and the laboratory faces a looming employee shortage.

But, who knows, on her bike ride home next year, a young student from Butte Middle School might stop and examine a plaque commemorating engineer Deslonde de-Boisblanc, who famously came up with the design of INL's 50-year-old Advanced Test Reactor while on his work commute.

This young student might become inspired to follow in his footsteps, to create something so lasting and important that half a century later people are erecting plaques to celebrate the achievement.

But first she'll need an education. That's where BSU comes in.

Boise State University is one of the nation's finest institutions of higher learning, dedicated to helping all Idahoans improve their lives, whether they live in Boise or Butte City. That's why professors such as Hill and Gassner will jump on Interstate 84 this spring, make a right at Mountain Home and follow State Highway 20 until they reach Arco.

"The upside for Boise State is, it builds relationships and promotes technical assistance in this community," Hill said. "That INL is willing to work with us to do this is incredible. Hopefully this relationship will continue."

As for Butte County and the 2,622 people who call it home, results will be measured in how they wield their new tools. There can be no doubt that, as Butte County celebrates its centennial — 100 years of living outside the box — those hardy souls in Arco, Howe, Butte City and Moore would have it no other way.

"This is a place where results matter," Hampton said, "and we plan to make the most of this opportunity."