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Durant celebrates economic anniversary

By **MATT SWEARENGIN**
Managing editor

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DURANT — Today is the 10th anniversary of Durant having a full-time executive director dedicated to economic development in the city, a decision officials say has created thousands of new jobs and raised the average income by \$10,000.

Tommy Kramer, executive director of the Durant Industrial Authority, was hired 10 years ago. The Durant Industrial Authority was founded in 1964, but it wasn't until 1998 that the city created a full-time position dedicated to luring businesses to the city.

Kramer credits "Team Durant" with making economic development a model for the rest of the state and north Texas.

Team Durant is any group of people, businesses and organizations who join together to promote economic development.

"I created the image of Team Durant," Kramer said. "It is a different group of local business leaders that I bring in to support each one of our new projects and our existing business expansions. Whatever the project scope is, I bring in Team Durant business leaders to support that project.

"The team is different for every project."

Also part of this team is the Durant Economic Development Council, a group of volunteer

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NYSE	8766.56	
↓ -75.33		(-0.85%)
S&P 500	1308.68	
↓ -9.32		(-0.71%)
AMEX	2238.94	
↓ -15.20		(-0.67%)
RUS 2K	710.26	
↓ -9.55		(-1.33%)
Crude Oil	136.54	
↓ -0.20		(-0.15%)
30YR Yield	4.67	
↓ -0.06		(-1.27%)

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community leaders who support Team Durant.

"Team Durant has raised the bar in the arena of economic development," Kramer said. "We have communities in Oklahoma and Texas contacting us wanting to know the foundation of success for Team Durant."

Kramer cited figures compiled by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce that show the local economy has grown tremendously.

According to Kramer, almost 4,000 new jobs have been created since 1998 and the unemployment rate has been cut drastically since the early 1990s. In 1991, the unemployment rate was 7.9 percent, according to the ODOC, and today, it hovers around 2.8 percent.

"We are No. 2 in the state in job creation and employment," Kramer said.

The average per capital personal income has also risen by almost \$10,000, according to Kramer. Data compiled by the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission shows the average income in 1996 was \$15,838. In 2006, it was \$25,733.

"Not only have we made significant increases in bringing new businesses to Durant and creating jobs, we've created better paying jobs," Kramer said.

Also, city sales tax collections have increased at a rate of \$110,000 per penny taxation, per month, according to Kramer.

"We're collecting at a rate of \$900,000 a month in total sales tax," Kramer said.

Durant's current city sales tax rate is 3.75 percent. It will increase to 4.375 percent when the tax for a new high school begins July 1. The city's overall tax rate, including state and county, will be 9.125 percent.

The city of Durant, DIA and Team Durant received an award at the 2007 Annual Conference for Outstanding Economic Development Efforts from the Oklahoma Commerce Community Infrastructure Team.

The award was received because the city received five grants for infrastructure related to economic development. These grants were all awarded in 2007, and, according to Kramer, that is a record in the state.

These projects were: Eagle Suspensions, \$500,000 for a rail spur; American Heritage, \$100,000 industrial road; ICON Manufacturing, \$99,080 sewer line extension; Ed F. Davis Distributing, \$80,000 water line extension, and Sanimax, \$100,000 industrial road.

In addition, the city received five other CDBG grants from 1999-2005. The 10 projects totaled \$3,379,080 in funding.

"We have created just tons of jobs and new growth," Kramer said. "What I am excited about is, No. 1, Durant Industrial Authority and Economic Development Council are all volunteers, and it's been a tremendous experience for me to be able to work with these volunteers for 10 years and create over 4,000 new jobs and literally hundreds of millions of dollars in new business development."

Kramer said that in 10 years of working together, all votes by city council, DIA, and the planning and zoning commission have been a unanimous "yes."



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"Every project I have presented to them, has been a 100-percent 'yes' vote," Kramer said. That's amazing to think that someone didn't jump and vote 'no.'"

DIA Chairman John Cathey spends countless hours on a weekly basis supporting economic development by leading DIA, according to Kramer, and there is the same support from the city council and City Manager Jim Dunegan and his staff. Kimberly Bowen is the DIA's administrative and research assistant.

The mission statement of DIA/Team Durant is to create good jobs with benefits that improve the quality of life for the community's citizens.

"The formula for our success is to focus 100 percent on job creation and the two things you have to have to make that work in any community are a professional leadership team and funding to support business development," Kramer said.

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