“Become Stronger by Working Together” was the theme of the annual Phillips County Economic Development Corporation (PCEDC) meeting held Monday, March 30, and many community members were honored for their collaborations.

Two organizations earned Collaboration Awards from PCEDC Monday night: Engage Haxtun and the Holyoke and Haxtun Ambulance Services.

Engage Haxtun is a collaboration of the Haxtun school district, hospital, city, economic development, Chamber of Commerce and Vision Committee. As PCEDC executive director Nici Bishop explained, the community came together to identify projects and goals that are most important to the town. They then prioritized them and everyone works together to support one project at a time. In 2008, that project was the new Haxtun Child Care Center.

Holyoke and Haxtun Ambulance Services work together to provide emergency care in the county. Since the early 1990s, Phillips County has received funding from the state for Emergency Medical Services. A council was formed and a plan adopted to split the money evenly between the two ambulance services.

The council worked out an intergovernmental agreement on putting money towards purchasing a new ambulance every three-four years. Also, the newest and oldest ambulances are traded yearly. One hospital will get the newest and oldest ambulances for one year, and the other the following year. The ambulance services also agree to back each other up if one hospital’s ambulances are all being used at the same time.

Another award, the 2008 Board Recognition, was given to Jim McBee for his eight years of service on the PCEDC board. However, McBee was absent from Monday’s meeting.

In her report, Bishop touched briefly on the projects the corporation has been a part of in the past year. One major project getting recent attention is the possibility of a Wisdom Poultry Processing Facility being located in Haxtun. PCEDC has been working with Jim Keeler, economic development manager with NMPP Energy, and Mark Hutchison, food industry condultant with University of Nebraska-Lincoln, to apply for grant funding.

Currently, said Bishop, the project has received a $15,500 grant from the Colorado Dept. of Agriculture to conduct a feasibility study. Now they are just waiting for the paperwork and expect to start the study soon. If it is found to be feasible, she added, they can then tap into more grants.

Another project mentioned by Bishop was Pamida. Even though the new store will not be built, she believes some successes came out of the project. First, PCEDC was able to bridge the gap between the City of Holyoke and the landowner when there was a stalemate on annexing the land south of town. This is important, she added, because this area is now available for future development by the city.

Another positive that came out of the ordeal is the new Pamida Pharmacy. Before Pamida

came in, said Bishop, the current pharmacist was looking to close or sell the business. Because Pamida bought it, Holyoke still has a local pharmacy.

Recent board activities include the adoption of a new policy governing NECALG funding received from Enterprize Zone projects within the county. The intent of the funding is to promote entrepreneurship and new business development within Phillips County.

The policy and procedure that was adopted outlines eligibility requirements and the evaluation process through which applicants are chosen. For more specific information on those requirements and to pick up an application, contact Bishop at 854-4386.

Big changes are being made to the PCEDC web site, announced Bishop. The board recently approved an update, which is expected to be completed by the end of the summer. Bishop promises it will have a whole new look and be much more user friendly. She noted the new site will feature more pictures of Phillips County and people are encouraged to send their photos in for consideration.

Youth engagement is another area PCEDC has been working on by helping local FBLA students with business plans and getting both Holyoke and Haxtun students to participate in Rural Ameritown. Haxtun has applied what they've learned to start their own coffee shop business, and Bishop said she hopes Holyoke will soon follow its example.

She also touched briefly on Phillips County community projects such as the Haxtun Child Care Center, the Haxtun Centennial throws and the new Event Center building, as well as the great Phillips County representation that was present at Rural Philanthropy Days in Burlington over the past summer.

Bishop pointed out she is now a certified business counselor with the Small Business Development Center, and is able to provide assistance to new businesses and expansions. She is working with SBDC directors to host a NxLevel training course this fall. She explained it is an intensive, eight-class course designed to teach prospective business owners the details of making a business plan.

Keynote speaker Susann Mikkelson of Rocky Mountain Farmers Union was there to promote the RMFU's Hometown Community Foundation program.

Mikkelson began by pointing out there is going to be a huge transfer of wealth from one generation to the next in the next 50 years, as baby boomers age. With younger generations moving out of rural areas, this means that wealth leaves with them.

Establishing a community foundation, said Mikkelson, would give community members the means to manage charitable donations through estate planning. Rather than donating to a private entity, residents could donate to the general fund, with the established community foundation board choosing which projects to donate to.

The benefit, she said, is these foundations can provide many services to donors who want to keep their estate in their community but want to avoid the administrative and legal costs of starting independent foundations. It also allows those who are not millionaires to donate what they can.

Bishop added after Mikkelson's speech that PCEDC board members have been in talks for several years with RMFU about establishing a Community Foundation in Phillips County.

Current members of the board include Alicia Schram, Tom Bennett, Mark Farnsworth, Lyle McBride, Randy Schafer, Jamie Tori, Jared Anderson, Ray Bailey and Candie Salyards.

PCEDC's demographics cover the entire county, including Amherst, Haxtun, Holyoke and Paoli.