

The Alex Area Stewards group has defined 13 key destiny drivers that will work to strengthen economic vitality for the region. This article is one of 13 being released to describe the importance of building a strong future for the region. If this or any other destiny driver ignites your passion for the future, call the stewardship committee at (320) 763-4545 or by going to www.alexareastewards.com and become a part of shaping the destiny of our region.

Title: **“Supporting Business Growth – Locally”**

Destiny Driver: “Support the startup, expansion, and growth of 12 new and established businesses each year in the Alexandria region.”

The entire Alexandria region is very fortunate to have a well-balanced economy. From the medical centers in Alexandria, Osakis, and Glenwood, to the manufacturing companies in Carlos, and Brandon, to the retail, tourism, and service businesses that are spread throughout the region, we are home to a wide variety of businesses. From this variety comes a stable regional economy and a wide range of employment possibilities for current and future area residents.

The economic strength and balance of our region is what the Alex Area Stewards are planning to build upon through this Destiny Driver: “Support the startup, expansion, and growth of 12 new and established businesses each year in the Alexandria region.”

Based upon the Community Perception Survey results, 70% of people feel that “The retail growth in the region is good for the quality of life,” and 61% of people felt that the region needs more manufacturing jobs. In addition, a significant number of people commented that the Alexandria region needs more job opportunities for current and future residents.

Statistics show us that approximately 70% of a community’s new job creation comes from its existing businesses. Based upon this, it makes sense to focus a significant amount of effort on retaining and growing the businesses that already call our region home. On the other side of the coin, it is vitally important to provide business startup and growth assistance to our local entrepreneurs and individuals/businesses who desire to relocate to our region. Not only does the successful startup and growth of these smaller businesses provide new jobs in niche markets, but it helps to support the larger established businesses that are already here.

An excellent metaphor highlighting the need for both large and small businesses is the making of cement: To make good cement, you need rocks (larger businesses) and sand (small businesses). Without both, your cement won’t stay together or hold up over time. The same concept applies to our regional business community. To be successful and to be able to weather economic changes, both large and small businesses are crucial for success.

While it is a business owner's decision on whether or not to expand, grow, or start a business in any location, business assistance organizations strive to provide the best information and resources at their disposal. The decisions to expand, hire additional employees, or even close a company are first, last, and always a *business* decision. With this understanding, local business assistance organizations will continue striving to promote the economic strengths, benefits, and attractiveness of the Alexandria region, and continue to help *support the startup, expansion, and growth of new and established businesses*.

According to the US Census Bureau, there are 4,269 firms (businesses) spread across Douglas County and 1,197 firms in Pope County, based upon 2002 information. While many of these businesses may only employ one or a few people, every one of them is important to the economic success of our region. While they provide different goods and services to their customers, each helps to stimulate the local economy in numerous ways; from purchasing business and personal goods and services, to supporting our schools and infrastructure through the payment of property taxes, to simply increasing the overall awareness of the region through their customer contacts and marketing efforts.

No matter their size, number of employees, or annual sales, every business that calls the Alexandria region home is important to the area's continued success. By actively striving to assist with the growth, startup, and recruitment of current and future businesses, our area will continue to grow and prosper and to provide new employment opportunities and attractiveness to our regional workforce.

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