

D E C E M B E R 2 0 2 3

VOLUME 1

# KODIAK ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



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A  
MESSAGE  
FROM  
KEDC  
BOARD  
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KARL  
HERTZ

# KEDC End of Year Report

I grew up in Iowa, and as a kid, I would often ride along with my grandfather across the pasture to feed cattle. As we bounced along in his powder blue chevy pickup, grandpa would listen to one of his favorite artists, Loretta Lynn. As I reflect on KEDC's past years, one of Lynn's songs keeps replaying in my mind- *We've Come A Long Way, Baby*.

As most know, KEDC was born out of the pandemic as a mechanism to distribute CARES Act Funding. The team was very small, comprised of John Whiddon, Mark Anderson, Sarah Phillips and Aimee Williams. That small, but mighty, team worked to organize applications and distribute \$4.5M of CARES Act funds, helping Kodiak businesses weather those dark days of COVID-19.

Today, KEDC is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded by community leaders who recognize the need to broaden and strengthen Kodiak's economy. Our board members represent some of the most influential employers on the island and our projects are focused on addressing Kodiak's root issues of workforce housing and workforce development. We are relationship builders, idea generators, and our solution focused programs connect the public and private sectors to further diversify Kodiak's future.

In 2023, it became evident that our volunteer board of directors would not be able to keep all KEDC's initiatives at the forefront and the board voted to hire an Executive Director. As a board we knew what we wanted in an ED; someone with KEDC president John Whiddon's connections across the state, passion for Kodiak, and boundless energy. After searching for months, John resigned from the board to become KEDC's Interim Executive Director, a part-time job he has turned into a full-time passion. Melissa Schoenwether joined KEDC as our Associate Director and together they have elevated KEDC, putting our organization on the economic development map.

In 2024, KEDC will officially form the Kodiak Community Land Trust, host the second annual Kodiak Career Expo, continue our community's Coast Guard Base Expansion discussions, and further explore elements of our Blue Economy and Mariculture developments. We've come a long way, but as my grandfather would say, "We are not planting trees for today." What we do takes creativity, vision, and time, so in many ways our journey has just begun.





# A Message from the Executive Director

## A YEAR IN REVIEW

2023 has been a year of significant growth and change for KEDC. After more than three years of operating with an all-volunteer board and part-time staff, the Board of Directors recognized that KEDC needed to hire full time staff to manage the growing number of programs and opportunities. KEDC's team now focuses on achieving the goals and objectives set out in KEDC's strategic plan.

Melissa Schoenwether was recruited and hired as Associate Director. Melissa has been instrumental in developing and implementing the Storefront Improvement Program or SIP. This innovative program provides up to \$7500 in matching grant funds to qualifying Downtown businesses. The SIP will accelerate the Downtown revitalization that has been promoted by the opening of the new Kodiak Marketplace.

**A brief recap of some of KEDC's programs and activities for 2023 include:**

In collaboration with the Kodiak Island Borough School District and Kodiak College, KEDC supported a four day career expo and a one day job fair. Plans are being made for another career expo in 2024.

KEDC's website has also been reformatted, creating a powerful and effective marketing tool to provide relevant information and extend KEDC's brand.

KEDC will wrap up two Denali Commission grants – one a pilot project to process kelp into animal feed. The other to help KEDC develop strategies and programs.

Kodiak continues to experience a critical shortage in affordable workforce housing. The KEDC team has made progress on developing a community land trust as a means to providing the community with affordable homes. Mariculture continues to offer new and exciting opportunities for Kodiak region harvesters, and KEDC is working on grants to support a feasibility study for Gibson Cove and assess the viability of building a dedicated processing facility and the creation of a Blue Economy Zone.

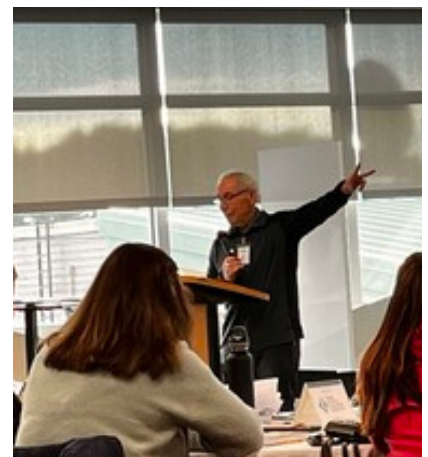
KEDC is partnering with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, (RCAC) to develop a professional approach to implement community based economic development strategies and to improve our organization's internal capabilities. RCAC will provide training over a two to three year period to expand KEDC's expertise in the area of economic development.

KEDC is positioned to facilitate and influence economic growth, to promote job creation, to strengthen existing businesses and support new business opportunities. KEDC's strategic plan is to create a resilient and robust economy for all Kodiak residents.

We look forward to continuing this work and making a difference in the lives of Kodiak residents in 2024,



John Whiddon, KEDC Executive Director



# REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN KODIAK: THE STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

On October 13, KEDC announced the Storefront Improvement Program. This matching grant program is the first for Kodiak with highly successful record across the United States, as well as close to home in Soldotna, Alaska. Created in partnership with Kodiak Area Native Association and the City of Kodiak, the Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) was designed to stimulate new private investment in the Downtown Kodiak area and launched as the highly anticipated Kodiak Marketplace opened.

KEDC Executive Director John Whiddon said, “Storefront Improvement programs have been successful in communities across the country. By creating financial incentives through matching grants, communities have developed effective private-public partnerships that have begun to restore traditional downtowns. KEDC’s SIP program has been very well received and combined with the opening of the new Kodiak Marketplace, will further efforts to restore and revitalize Kodiak’s core downtown area and create pleasing shopping experiences for locals and tourists alike.”

The SIP goals were:

1. Promote revitalization of our downtown area to attract both visitors and locals
2. Encourage new development and increase foot traffic Downtown
3. Ensure a healthy economy by supporting diverse local businesses
4. Improve storefront exteriors to create a more welcoming, customer-friendly appearance

During the eight week open application timeline, KEDC allocated more than 54 focused hours on this project directly supporting businesses. Each business has the opportunity to be awarded up to \$7500 in matching grant funds with work for projects having the entire year of 2024 to complete. Grants would be prioritized and awarded based on the creativity of the project as well as the transformative effect, number and type of specific improvements, amongst other things. Key areas of focus include beautification, accessibility, and safety improvements.

The Storefront Improvement Program Application Review Committee has representation from KANA, the City of Kodiak, and KEDC. With a focus on sustaining support for all businesses, the SIP Application Review Committee will select awardees for the grant, as well as offer valuable insight of ways to strengthen the application of those not selected in order to encourage them to resubmit and application for the next grant cycle.

SIP program coordinator Melissa Schoenwether shared, “The SIP challenged applicants to think strategically regarding the overall connectivity of the downtown area. Time and again I witnessed the shift from ‘I don’t think I have \$1,000 to invest in my business’ to a thoughtful exercise of marketing their business to foot traffic and understanding the value of investing in their outward appearance. Each person grew in consideration of how re-investing in their storefront, with the added support from the SIP grant, directly translates in to a stronger downtown economy.”

The grant awardees will be announced in January 2024.

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CAREER EXPO & JOB FAIR RECAP



## Career Expo Highlights

More than 40 KHS students were served through this program

Nine Businesses provided on-site access to fully immerse and expose students to career path opportunities

## BEGINNINGS OF THE PROGRAM

There has been much work done to support the Kodiak Workforce. KEDC's original Career Expo & Job Fair program coordinator Mallory Arnold had this to share:

*Growing up in Kodiak, opportunities for high school students to get hands-on experience in an industry did not exist. While I was a student at Kodiak High School, we were able to speak with organizations in Kodiak about job opportunities at the annual job fair, but that is where the exposure stopped. The Kodiak Economic Development Corporation saw this gap in workforce development and went to work on the first ever Career Expo. We had a vision that the Career Expo would simultaneously invest in the future of Kodiak's workforce and promote local businesses. The Kodiak Career Expo allowed high school students the opportunity to get a realistic view of what a day in an industry really looks like; it also gave organizations an opportunity to discuss the offerings that they have, including tuition reimbursement, on-the-job training programs, and benefit packages. Would you be surprised to know that most high school students do not understand the importance of a good healthcare plan and a 401K?*

*KEDC also emphasized to students that you do not have to go to college to have a successful career, especially in Kodiak. The career options in Kodiak are abundant and the Kodiak Economic Development Corporation wanted to ensure that the students saw that. I am excited to see KEDC continue to build workforce development programs for Kodiak's future. The opportunity to build and retain local talent is an investment in the community that will pay off for years to come.*

Mallory Arnold, now working as Manager of Clinical Operations at Providence, along with KEDC Board member and owner of Highmark Marine Fabrication, LLC, Cooper Curtis, were instrumental in laying the framework for the first Career Expo's success. Curtis shared, ***"As a small business owner and employer of many skilled trades, career and workforce development is of the utmost importance to the continued success of my business. The KEDC Career expo has done an exceptional job at introducing the up and coming workforce to the many opportunities that Kodiak has to offer. I look forward to the continued growth of this event."***

Businesses directly communicated to KHS students the education, local apprenticeships, outside training, and OJT offered by Kodiak's employers

More than 20 local businesses participated in the KEDC Job and Resource Fair 2023 held in conjunction with Career Expo

Listen to the original interview with KMXT about the goals and foundation behind the first Career Expo here: <https://kmxt.org/2023/02/talk-of-the-rock-career-expo-with-the-kodiak-economic-development-corp/>



# KEDC

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023



**Greg Zadina,  
KEDC Vice-President**



**Mark Andersen,  
KEDC Treasurer**



**Above Left: Cooper Curtis, Middle : Mike Pfeffer, Right: Cyndy Mika**



**Above Left: Thomas Panamaroff and Right: Jascha Zbitnoff**

*Ex Officio Members:  
Captain Jeremy Hall  
Mike Tvenge  
Aimee Williams*

*KEDC's mission is to improve the quality of life on Kodiak by developing partnerships to diversify the economy, supporting industry, and educating our youth and workforce to succeed in the global economy. Our Board of Directors reflect an array of experience, resources, and valuable insight to help KEDC fulfill the mission of developing a vibrant, diverse, and sustainable Kodiak economy.*