



LOS ANGELES COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



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News Release

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LAEDC Selects Ten Finalists For 2009 Most Business-Friendly City Competition

Ten L.A. County Cities Represent the Best in Economic Development Practices

Los Angeles— The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC) announced the finalists today for its 2009 *Most Business-Friendly City in L.A. County* award. The cities of **Alhambra, Downey, Lakewood, Long Beach, Torrance, and Whittier** are finalists for the population of 60,000 and over category, and the cities of **Bell Gardens, Commerce, La Mirada, and Santa Fe Springs** are finalists in the population under 60,000 category.

One winner from each category will be announced live at the 14th Annual Eddy Awards® honoring economic development leadership on Thursday, November 12, 2009, at the Beverly Hilton hotel (9876 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA 90210). The Eddy Awards® has become one of the most prestigious economic development award programs in the state of California, and more than 700 leaders from the business, government, and education sectors are expected to attend the gala dinner.

“These ten city finalists have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to creating a business-friendly environment where businesses can thrive and create jobs,” said Bill Allen, LAEDC president and CEO. “Each year, this competition reveals that more and more cities are being proactive in their efforts to retain and attract quality jobs and businesses in their communities. The ability and commitment of our local governments to attract and retain good jobs is absolutely essential if our region is to regain its economic vitality and sustain our quality of life.”

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In the past 25 years, the County of Los Angeles has added more than 2.5 million residents, but only about half a million jobs. Some cities in the County have actually lost jobs in that period, while others have added many new jobs. Much of the reason for that disparity is that many cities are more proactive than others about attracting and retaining quality jobs that pay good salaries and generate healthy tax revenues.

The award finalists were selected based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrated commitment to economic development as a priority
- Excellence in programs and services designed to facilitate business entry, expansion, and retention
- Economic development activity over the past three years
- Competitive business tax rates and fee structures
- Availability of economic incentives
- Effective communication with and about business clients

Each of the finalists has created a business-friendly environment that encourages businesses to locate or expand in their respective communities.

Cities with population over 60,000

Alhambra's business friendliness is evident in the incentives it offers to attract, retain and expand businesses and jobs. Alhambra offers financial assistance to targeted redevelopment areas, commercial businesses, and property owners who meet specific criteria. Other methods Alhambra has utilized to improve its economic base and eliminate physical deterioration of buildings include land acquisition, negotiated sale, threat of condemnation, providing lease agreements with an option to buy, holding a master lease and offering a sublease to a desired tenant, land write downs, tax increment financing, façade rehabilitation, rent subsidies and rebates. The city's finance department also provides business incentives by waiving license fees for nonprofit and religious organizations, as well as banks.

The City of **Downey** has a number of business incentives and cost-efficiency programs that help retain and attract businesses to the city. For example, the city's sign and awning program provides businesses with a 50 percent rebate of up to \$2,000 for the installation of new signage or a new awning displaying a business's name and logo. The façade improvement program also reimburses 50 percent (up to \$40,000) for costs related to exterior improvements to a commercial building. Downey also fosters effective communication with and about business by regularly using customer service surveys to

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make process improvements. The city promotes its successes by featuring city projects in its marketing materials and regularly distributing these materials at various public events. In addition, Downey has a dedicated website for businesses, a business newsletter and business guide to keep businesses informed of its many resources.

Lakewood provides business programs that help facilitate business retention, expansion and attraction. Established in 1999, the Lakewood Business Development Loan Program is a revolving loan fund that provides access to capital for small- and medium-sized businesses, and to encourage local shopping, the city has launched a marketing strategy that places banners surrounding Lakewood's largest shopping center. An economic development element has been a component of Lakewood's General Plan since 1996, and the goals of this plan are to maintain and expand retail sales tax revenues, help reverse the trend of local and regional job losses, maximize the development and economic potential of under-utilized properties zoned for commercial and manufacturing uses, and advocate the training of a sub-regional labor force that will be able to function successfully in the workplaces of the future.

Long Beach has demonstrated its commitment to retaining jobs in its region through an investment in the local business community by offering Enterprise Zone benefits, expedited permit processing, and a transparent, proactive government comprised of civic leaders who understand the necessity of planned growth. Their Long Beach Business Development Center offers grants and loans, permit and site selection assistance, and help with employee recruitment and training. Long Beach is investing \$1.5 billion in infrastructure improvements, which includes the Port of Long Beach, the nation's second largest port complex, to ensure its long term economic success. Long Beach has been named a finalist since the inception of the awards in 2006.

Torrance is committed to reducing red tape by guaranteeing a two week turn around time for initial review of projects and providing over the counter approval for minor projects. Next day inspection services or same day inspection for projects needing additional assistance is available to businesses, while a 24/7 voice response system is available for scheduling building inspections and obtaining status updates. Additional streamlining measures Torrance has implemented include a one-stop permit center, ombudsman services, online project status tracking, and training. Torrance is proud to have the second lowest rate of property crime and third lowest rate of violent crime among 15 L.A. County cities with populations of 100,000 residents.

Whittier is enhancing its economic development practices by delivering personalized service and promptly responding to business needs through the use of Regional Economic Development (RED) teams, as well as utilizing its economic development staff as primary ombudsman providers. Whittier

also dedicated a planning counter and building counter technicians to help expedite the plan processing. Whittier recently enhanced its planning review process by providing processing flowcharts and sample site plans for guidance. The city developed an in-house economic development program in 2006 with an economic development strategy that strengthens business attraction efforts. Whittier boasts 1,750 acres of open space, 19 parks, and several California Distinguished Schools.

Cities with population under 60,000

In the City of **Bell Gardens**, its Community Development staff has recently taken on the challenge of delivering a comprehensive property improvement program encompassing the major thoroughfares throughout the city. This program will provide business owners along the city's arteries with grants of up to \$15,000 and low interest loans of up to \$50,000 to make structural and aesthetic improvements to their properties. Redevelopment dollars have also been used to remediate and develop a 4.33 acre brown field site located in the southwestern portion of the city. In order to demonstrate its partnership with businesses, the city's staff fast tracks business licensing, planning reviews, building permits and inspections, and advocates for them with local utility companies. City staff also assists businesses with workforce needs by coordinating job fairs and other employment related services on their behalf.

The **City of Commerce**'s commitment to its business community is demonstrated through the free employment recruitment services offered to residents by the city's business development center. The center provides job announcements, applications, and job placement assistance. Training and hiring tax incentive information is supplied to employers through the center as well. To retain company employees, the City of Commerce offers a free bus system, four recreational parks, Metrolink access to the Inland Empire, ample parking, and low-cost gym memberships. Commerce has no city property, gross receipts or utility taxes on businesses.

La Mirada was recognized as one of the least expensive cities in which to conduct business by the Kosmont-Rose Institute "Cost of Doing Business Survey." La Mirada has never levied a municipal property tax or utility user's tax. As a result, the city does not levy taxes on electricity, telephone, gas, water or cellular telephones and does not have special assessment districts. La Mirada does not impose impact or exaction fees on businesses seeking to expand or relocate to the city. Its *Dedicated to Service* philosophy includes onsite visits by the Mayor and staff, bi-annual business surveys, and group luncheons to recognize leadership within the business community. La Mirada was a finalist in 2008.

Santa Fe Springs strategically invested in infrastructure, public safety, and other services to help businesses prosper. They created a five-year redevelopment implementation plan to highlight

strategies for their economic development efforts and business and job expansion activities. Expedited permitting and formalized coordination among all departments on all development projects are part of Santa Fe Springs' effort to help businesses cut through the traditional layers of bureaucracy. The city also regularly visits with business owners in their community to assist with retention and expansion efforts. Santa Fe Springs was a finalist in 2008.

Last year, the City of Santa Clarita was the winner for the category of 50,000 residents and above, while the City of Vernon was the winner for the category of 50,000 and under residents. Lancaster won the Most Business-Friendly City in L.A. County award in 2007 and El Segundo was the first winner in 2006. There is a three-year moratorium before a winning city can reapply for the award.

In addition to announcing the winners of the Most Business-Friendly City in L.A. County award, the Eddy Awards® will also honor gifted surgeon and visionary entrepreneur Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong and The Boeing Company for their outstanding private sector leadership in economic development.

City Information

1. Alhambra: Mayor Steven Placido. <http://www.cityofalhambra.org/government/>
2. Bell Gardens: Mayor Priscilla Flores. http://www.bellgardens.org/n_council.asp
3. Commerce: Mayor Joe Aguilar. <http://www.ci.commerce.ca.us/main.asp>
4. Downey: Mayor Mario Guerra. <http://www.downeyca.org/index.php>
5. Lakewood: Todd Rogers. http://www.lakewoodcity.org/about_lakewood/default.asp
6. La Mirada: Mayor Susan Tripp. <http://www.cityoflamirada.org/>
7. Long Beach: Mayor Bob Foster. <http://www.ci.long-beach.ca.us/>
8. Santa Fe Springs: Mayor Luis Gonzalez. <http://www.santafesprings.org/>
9. Torrance: Mayor Frank Scott. <http://www.ci.torrance.ca.us/1928.htm>
10. Whittier: Mayor Bob Henderson. <http://www.whittierch.org/content/CC01.html>

About the Eddy

The Eddy Awards® were introduced by the LAEDC in 1996 to celebrate individuals and organizations that demonstrate exceptional contributions to positive economic development in the region. The Eddy Awards® recognize individuals, companies, and in 2006 began honoring cities as well for leadership in economic development. For more information about the Eddy Awards®, including sponsorship opportunities, please visit www.laedc.org/eddy.

About LAEDC (www.LAEDC.org)

The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), the region's premier business leadership organization, is a private, non-profit organization established in 1981. Its mission is to attract, retain, and grow business and jobs for the regions of Los Angeles County. Since 1996, the LAEDC has helped retain or attract more than 152,000 jobs, providing \$7.5 billion in direct economic impact from salaries and \$128 million in annual tax revenue benefit to local governments and education in Los Angeles County. Visit www.laedc.org or call (888) 4-LAEDC-1.

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