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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **BEST PLACE PROJECT MOVES AHEAD**

Almost one year after Mayor John Engen announced the launch of the Best Place Project economic development initiative, he and partners from the private and public sectors announced Tuesday they have raised \$2.3 million toward the effort and have formed the Missoula Economic Partnership to execute the goals of the Project.

Those goals are all about jobs, Engen said.

“We’re building a business that’s growing business,” Engen said. “We have community investors who believe we live in the best place and that our economic development efforts should reflect that.

“We’ve done everything we said we were going to do. We’ve raised money. We’ve garnered community support. We’ve built a business plan. And we’re in the process of hiring an executive to implement that plan.”

Members of the founding board have worked through conversations with the community and the project’s investors. The plan calls for creation of 2,500 jobs paying an average annual wage of \$37,000 during the next five years. It also includes work on business retention, business reinvestment and developing and redeveloping infrastructure.

The fund-raising goal is \$3.2 million.

“Today we have a single request of those in attendance,” Engen asked attendees at the Tuesday kickoff at the Garlington, Lohn and Robinson Building. “When the Partnership comes calling, please open your doors, hear our story and consider an investment in Missoula’s future.”

The Project’s founding board and executive team have created the Missoula Economic Partnership as the organization that will do the work. An executive recruiting firm will bring eight finalists for the Partnership’s executive position to the selection committee, which will then invite three or four candidates for interviews. That process should be set by the end of February. The Partnership will reach out for additional board members.

Additional goals of the Project include:

- Increase new capital investments by \$150 million;
- Encourage 25 new business startups with innovative or tech-related concepts;
- Recruit 25 best-fit companies to relocate to Missoula;
- Generate direct payroll totaling \$172,975,000 annually from new or expanding businesses in targeted sectors; and
- Conduct 4-6 annual business-prospect missions and trade events to educate and attract national, statewide and regional site selection consultants and targeted prospects seeking business opportunities.

“It’s incredible the reception we’ve gotten and the momentum we’ve gained,” said Jeff Fee, President of St. Patrick Hospital and a member of the founding board. “This work is an imperative for this community so we can put people to work, move Missoula forward and build our economy.”

Founding board members are:

Jeff Fee, President, St. Patrick Hospital  
 Stacey Mueller, Publisher, Missoulian  
 Scott Burke, President and CEO, First Security Bank  
 Dirk Visser, CEO, Allegiance Benefit Plan Management  
 Mayor John Engen

Significant community partners include:

The University of Montana and President Royce Engstrom  
 Missoula County and Commissioner Jean Curtiss, Chair, Missoula Board of County Commissioners  
 City of Missoula and Mayor John Engen  
 Missoula International Airport  
 Many early supporters from the private sector

Special thanks to Garlington, Lohn and Robinson for sharing their new building for Tuesday’s kickoff event.

“We believe that it’s a new day for economic development in Missoula,” Engen said. “It’s a cause for celebration and a renewed commitment to the hard but rewarding work ahead.”

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