

City Business
A Horse Trader from Way Back
by Michael Leamons

An effective business model requires a focus on both management and sales. I'm responsible for much of the management part of the equation, but the City has been lacking in the sales department. Good management practices, alone, cannot solve the City's economic problems. Quite frankly, we need more sales. By more sales, I mean more business activity, more businesses, more residents, more tourists, etc...

Recently, the Hico Economic Development Corporation (EDC) took action to promote more sales; the Board decided to hire a part-time Executive Director. When I learned of their decision, I was concerned they might end up with an academic with intellectual knowledge but no sales ability or with someone fresh out of college, still wet behind the ears. The need was for a bona-fide salesman with real world experience, who could hit the ground running.

Having watched him in action, I was pleased they decided to hire Mike James. Once while in Homestead, I noticed a woman who seemed to be just a looker. James struck up a conversation with her. (I was thinking, "Why waste your time; she's not going to buy anything.") During the course of their conversation she expressed interest in one item, but indicated it was out of her budget. A small discount was offered, and the sale was made. That's when I began to suspect James was a horse trader from way back. Later, I asked Mike to accompany me to the Metroplex in search of used office furniture for City Hall. I asked him to handle the price negotiations; my suspicions were confirmed when we walked away with a 20% discount off the listed price.

For much of his career, James was in the technical sales side of the telecom industry, having worked for both Sprint and Cable and Wireless. In addition, when he ran Tekton, his own contracting business, James had to go out and sell his services. Now he's gearing up to sell Hico to potential investors.

His initial efforts have been directed toward making the merchandise presentable. Attention has been focused on the City's website, brochures, signage and general appearance. Regarding the City's internet presence, with James encouragement the EDC, the City Council and the Chamber of Commerce are all working together to sponsor a comprehensive Hico website. Being the first encounter many have with Hico, it's critical to have an attractive, informative and up-to-date website. It's our cyber portal to the world.

After being approached by Hico's new EDC Executive Director, First Choice Power, CenturyLink and Atmos Energy all have generously agreed to contribute toward the development and maintenance of the new website. (First Choice also agreed to furnish LED "Christmas" lights to be used to outline the tops of buildings on both sides of the esplanade and down part of First Street. Installation should begin this week.)

Regarding brochures, they have been authorized by the EDC and are in the process of being designed. Regarding signage, James is investigating various options for new signage to be placed along the highways leading into town as well as directional signage to be located within town.

To make our fair city even more attractive to potential sales prospects, James has worked with the EDC and City Council to establish a Hico Beautification Committee.

While on the City Council in Sanger, Texas, he had the opportunity to watch a very effective beautification committee in action. Hico's Committee was appointed and commissioned at the November 8th City Council Meeting.

Once the groundwork has been laid, it will be time to start courting prospective clients. It's not an easy market, and it won't happen overnight, but with time I'm convinced he will reel in some sales. Should you have any leads, please direct them to Mike. His position is part time, so if you don't find him at City Hall, check across the street at Homestead. Only brace yourself, lest you walk out the front door with a purchase tucked under one arm.

Kudos to the EDC for an excellent choice. May God bless the City of Hico.