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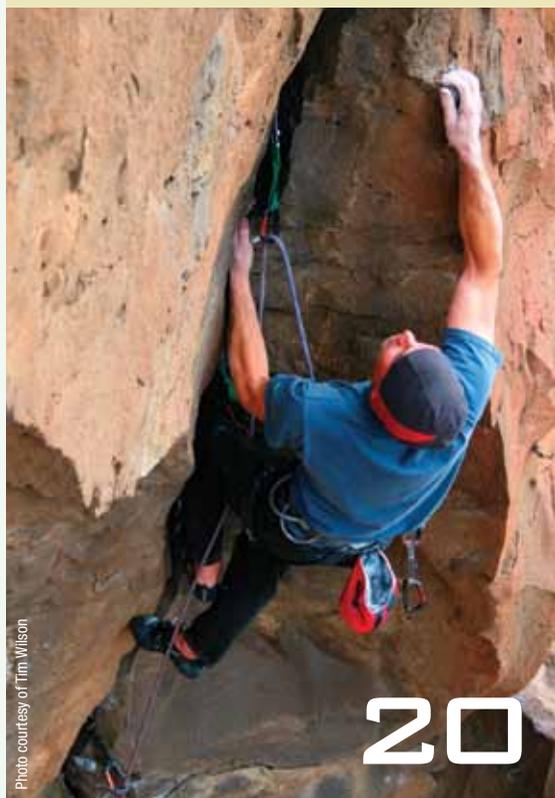


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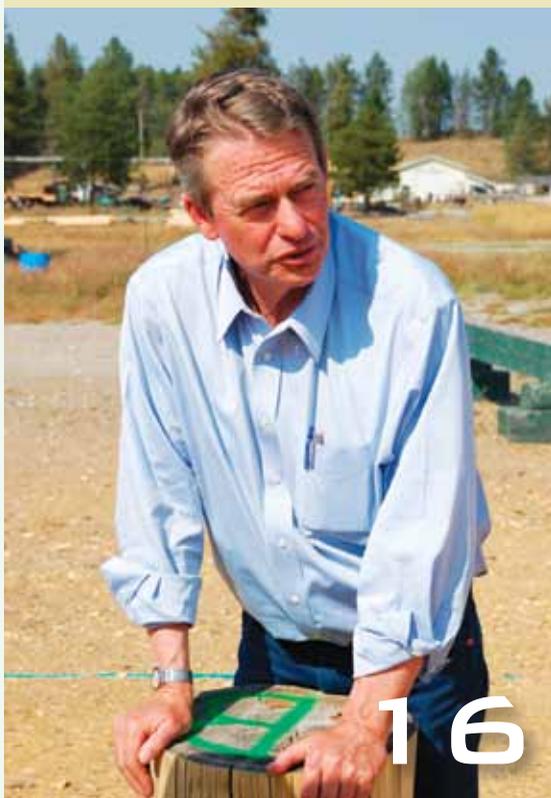
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Idaho's Thriving Industry No Small Potatoes

Business-friendly and outdoorsy, Lt. Gov. Little says the time to relocate to Idaho is now

BY NICK SANCHEZ
FROM COEUR D'ALENE, ID

North of Boise and just east of Spokane, Washington on the Idaho Panhandle sits Coeur d'Alene, the state's second-largest city and home to the nation's largest on-water light show and the world's largest living Christmas tree.

Cradled between the 25 mile-long Lake Coeur d'Alene and the Coeur d'Alene National Forest, the city's residents are never more than a few minutes away from an expedition into the wild—a point that Lieutenant Governor Brad Little made sure to highlight during a showcase event sponsored by the state's Economic Development office.

"Seventy percent of the state of Idaho is public land," he says, "and a vast majority of that land represents recreational opportunity—a key component in attracting the many companies we have over the years."

Today, Idaho is one of the fastest-growing states in the union when it comes to growth in exports—which include semiconductors, industrial equipment, precious metals and agriculture commodities. It is also one of only 17 states to maintain a trade surplus with the global economy.

Having gained publicity in places like Forbes for its business-friendly climate in recent years, Lt. Gov. Little explains that Idaho's business development practices actually go back some years. This experience and institutional memory are assets that inform Idaho's current environment of success, he says.

THE TRAIL TO A BUSINESS-FRIENDLY CLIMATE

Not too long ago—back in the late eighties—Idaho's economy was slouching. That's when a handful of leading Idahoan businessmen put their heads and wallets together, pledging tens of thousands of dollars over four years to establish an economic development forum for Kootenai County (of which Coeur d'Alene is the seat).

One of those leaders was Bob Potter, who has recruited more than 70 businesses to the Inland Northwest region since 1987. Altogether, those businesses have generated nearly 4,000 new jobs and more than \$328 million in capital investments primarily in the Coeur d'Alene area.

Potter, who heads up the Inland Northwest Economic Alliance, a consortium of 11 regional economic development organizations, is a close ally of Lieutenant Governor Little and the Economic Development office of Idaho's Department of Commerce.

The Department itself steers a public/private partnership that has brought the state a number of key businesses. Lt. Gov. Little himself points out that since 1987 the Department's budget has remained a flat \$300,000 and it's staff a mere two employees.

Every year, Little has managed to turn these modest resources into a serious force of economic development. The companies recruited

by the office paid 4.6 million dollars in property tax last year alone.

"That means that every year, incrementally, the office sees a 20-fold return on investment," he explains.

"This is not to say that Idaho seeks to wring tax dollars from businesses looking to relocate to Idaho, though," Little emphasizes. "We are a fiscally responsible state, and we believe in everyone paying their fair share, but here each company's fair share is much smaller than the onerous share they pay in other states."

A RELOCATION SUCCESS STORY: BUCK KNIVES

In late 2004, CEO C. J. Buck made the decision to move Buck Knives from San Diego to Post Falls, Idaho—located less than 10 miles west of Coeur d'Alene in Kootenai County.

Having been founded and stationed in San Diego for over 100 years, the decision to relocate a company with such strong roots—a company responsible for inventing the original folding lockback or "buck" knife—was a tremendous one.

Over the years preceding the move, Buck had gone from having over 20,000 small cutlery dealers to having fewer, more consolidated accounts with companies like Wal-Mart and JCPenney.

As volume increased, Buck remained committed to Made-in-America quality. California, however, put the company at a 20 percent price disadvantage compared to other states where the cost of doing business was lower.

At a time when the city of San Diego had trouble coordinating with the state government to put together an incentives package to keep Buck in California, the city of Post Falls, the county commissioners of Kootenai and Idaho's Department of Commerce acted in concert to bring Buck to Idaho.

The coalition assisted Buck in building a 125,000 square foot facility in less than a year and secured them a temporary certification of occupancy—which helped them get ahead of an influx of orders after one of their competitors went out of business.

"The way Idaho and its municipalities' are able to work together and work together swiftly is not something you see in other states," Little beams. "Overall, the success of the Buck relocation brought a significant level of credibility to our manufacturing sector."

Buck was also able to pay for the entirety of its moving expenses through workers' compensation savings after just one year of operating in Idaho.

CABELA'S AND THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Since Buck Knives' arrival, the state has welcomed 32 more companies to its wide-open spaces.

In 2008, growing national retail chain Cabela's elected Post Falls to be the home of its new large-format superstore, a 125,000 square foot retail and educational attraction.



Lt. Gov. Brad Little believes that Idaho's public land and fiscal responsibility make it a perfect state for business



"We were able to balance and work a solution at every level with them," says Little. "It's been a great success for both Idaho and Cabela's."

In response to a question concerning the Office's most recent negotiations, Little reveals that they were recently in negotiations with Caterpillar, makers of heavy machinery and equipment.

"In negotiating with Caterpillar, we came in second, which drives me crazy. But the truth is that they had already decided on another state when they approached us. We came very close to stealing them away though. Within three days we were able to put together a proposal that beat what they'd been working on with Washington for over a year and a half—which is again a testament to Idaho's responsiveness," he relates.

Asked what he envisions for continuing to grow the outdoor industry in Idaho, Little points to the fact that the state is already a powerhouse in high-tech and microprocessors, and just this past year grew to become the nation's top-ranking state in number of

"Idaho's small population packs a punch when it comes to innovation"

patents per capita.

"Idaho's small population packs a punch when it comes to innovation and product development," Little declares. He suggests that it makes perfect sense for technical outdoor brands to set up shop in Idaho because "there's no shortage of creative minds to hire or outdoor playgrounds perfect for product testing."

In addition to his duties overseeing the Of-



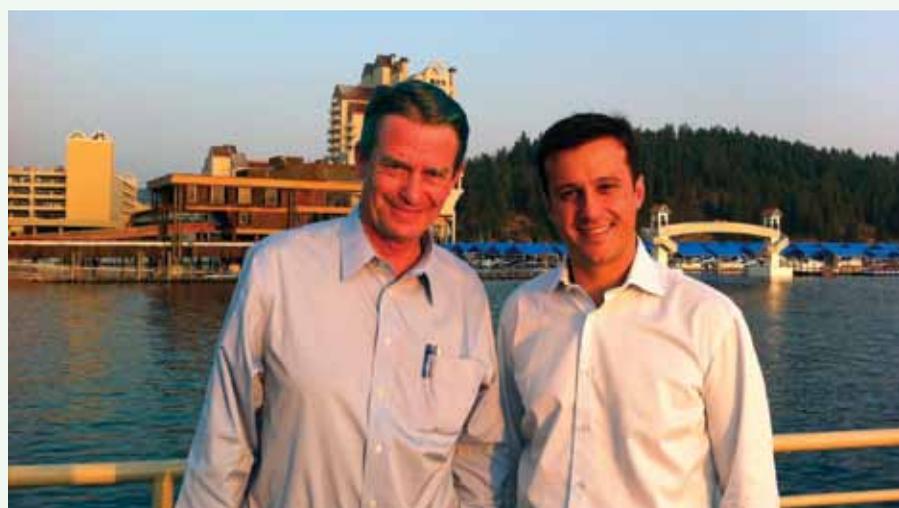
Buck Knives relocated to Post Falls, ID in 2004

fice of Economic Development, Lieutenant Governor Little's duties also include presiding over the state senate, which means he is involved on a daily basis with the state's legislative process. Laced into his presentation and concluding it were some interesting points regarding Idaho's approach to fiscal responsibility and business-friendly policy.

"Our law makers pass tax policy through four simple filters; we ask if the legislation is fair, simple, predictable and competitive," he explains. "We are also—almost notoriously—fiscally responsible. In the same four month period that Standard and Poor's was downgrading the federal bond rating, they were upgrading the state of Idaho, for the simple reason that when times got tough we balanced our budget using the few hundred billion dollars we had in reserve."

All of this, Little emphasizes time and time again, positions Idaho as a prime spot to do business in.

"There are a million reasons to consider Idaho," he says with a smile. "I could go on forever about everything from our beautiful terrain to our tax policy, but it becomes a thousand times more interesting when we make contact with new businesses and dig into individual plans of action. That's when the real fun starts." 



Idaho's Lieutenant Governor Brad Little and Outdoor Magazine Publisher Raimondo Forlin