

Officials tout 2010 initiatives, applaud Howard revitalization

By: Elisa Sand

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After eight years of revitalization efforts in Howard, Miner County Community Revitalization (MCCR) has learned that effective revitalization efforts in a community take simultaneous development in health services, housing, businesses and the school district.

On Wednesday, during Capital for a Day in Howard, South Dakota Secretary of Tourism and State Development Richard Benda commended local officials for being on the right track.

“It really is all connected,” Benda said. “each issue affects the other.”

State officials spent part of the afternoon in a community development town hall meeting. Topics ranged from healthcare and social services to education and the various 2010 initiatives established by Gov. Mike Rounds.

Each department discussed its work in providing needs for rural communities.

Secretary of Social Services Deb Bowman, formerly of Madison, said the state is looking at the future needs for long-term healthcare facilities.

Secretary of Health Doneen Hollingsworth said incentive programs are available to help with recruitment and retention of healthcare workers — one provides an incentive for physician assistants who commit to providing care in a rural community for three years; another provides an externship opportunity for third- and fourth-year dental students. Through the externship program, Hollingsworth said, students shadow profes-

sionals in rural communities.

Benda discussed 2010 initiatives that include doubling visitor spending, increasing the gross domestic product and becoming a leader in research development.

The goal, he said, is to brand South Dakota living as the best in the nation.

“Education is key,” he said. “We need communities to be strong and education institutions to be strong.”

Speaking for the Department of Education was Melody Schoop, director of accreditation and teacher quality. Achieving educational strength, she said, is a top priority in three strategic initiatives to be in place by 2010: starting strong, finishing strong and staying strong.

The first initiative, she said, aims to strengthen programs that affect children age 3 through grade 3 and look at accreditation and certification of preschool programs. The second initiative will increase the required mandatory age for being in school from 16 to 18, implement end of course exams, develop a virtual high school and put a laptop integration program in place.

The final initiative focuses on recruitment and retention of teachers by encouraging educators to stay in the state, and by providing incentives for people who go into professions that will serve high-need areas.

Although there are incentives available, Howard Superintendent Mike Cullen feels a local teacher shortage could be the sign of a

bigger problem.

“I truly believe South Dakota is on the verge of
a crisis