

# Council approves \$25K grant application for Old Pen



Rawlins Daily Times, Kathy Johnson A family visiting from Laramie County stopped in at the Wyoming Frontier Prison on Monday afternoon. They took a moment to get a family portrait in front of the historic site's colorful mural.

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Word of mouth.

That's the form of advertising that's drawing the most visitors to the Wyoming Frontier Prison in Rawlins, site director Tina Hill said.

She's looking at more targeted forms of advertising to draw visitors to the historic building.

The Rawlins City Council adopted, 5 to 0, a resolution Tuesday to help Old Pen Joint Powers Board apply for a \$25,000 Community Development Block Grant from the Wyoming Business Council.

Funds will enable Old Pen administrators to hire a marketing specialist to draft a marketing plan. The

document could help Old Pen officials apply for other grants, Hill said.

The specialist could also help in other ways.

"We have such a small budget, I always worry, 'Is this the best use of our money?'" Hill said.

It's not that Hill hasn't tried to promote the facility.

Travel magazines promoting Wyoming contain advertisements for the Old Pen, as do two billboards along Interstate 80, she said.

The Old Pen's Web site offers another means of reaching out-of-area visitors.

Still, most tourists are drawn to the historic prison after they hear about it from family and friends. Word of mouth extends outside of Wyoming borders, attracting visitors from Colorado and Utah, Hill said.

She added that Old Pen staff is conducting a survey to determine how visitors hear about the Old Pen.

The sprawling stone building attracts between 15,000 and 17,000 people a year on average, Hill said previously.

Visitors include tourists from Europe, China and Japan, as well as Old West history enthusiasts and ghost hunting groups, she added.

The facility's tourism numbers dropped off about 2 percent recently, Hill said.

But, the facility can still attract a crowd.

"Saturday, we had a blockbuster day," Hill said, adding that the Old Pen received 185 visitors on July 18 and collected almost \$1,000.

The facility brings in about \$450 per day on average during the summer, she added.

But local officials have suggested that the Old Pen can be made to attract more visitors by opening up the facility for conferences and other events.

The City Council also voted Tuesday to give staff the go-ahead to apply for a \$25,000 Business Council grant to update the city's master plan.

"I think we have a very good chance of getting both of these applications," City Grants Administrator Patrick Gonzales told the council Tuesday.

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