



Economic Development & Workforce Council Newsletter

2025| December

TOP STORY State of Estes Park:

What we learned in 2025 and how we are approaching 2026



The inaugural State of Estes Park was held, with 110 attendees braving a snowy morning to listen and learn with experts from the Town, county, and state. During the event, a number of speakers presented results from the 2025 year and a look-ahead at how businesses should be envisioning 2026.

Presentations included remarks from the event title sponsor, Platte River Power Authority, whose

General Manager/CEO Jason Frisbie took a look at the changing energy landscape and its potential impact on the Estes Valley: "The energy landscape is changing rapidly, driven by technology, noncarbon goals, and customer expectations," Frisbie said. "We see this as an opportunity to innovate and bring value to the communities we serve, by taking a balanced approach to our clean energy transition – expanding renewables, reducing emissions, and maintaining affordability and reliability, all while making sure our infrastructure meets your expectations," he added.

Frisbie's remarks were followed by a retrospective of the work of the Estes Chamber from outgoing Chair and founding member Keith Pearson: "As my tenure on this Board winds down, I want to reflect back to 2018," he began. "Estes Park had been without a Chamber of Commerce for more than a decade. But the needs of our community and its businesses continued to get more complex. In the absence of a chamber, an alphabet soup of organizations filled the void, with most being volunteer organizations, and as the needs continued to increase, they exceeded the capacity of these volunteers. So, a task force was formed to evaluate the benefit of a Chamber and many of these task force members became the inaugural Board of our newly formed Chamber, incorporated in May 2019. We stood on the shoulders of giants! But not any longer... our team has established a solid foundation on which we have built a strong Chamber and continue to build," Pearson added. He also recognized two other founding members who have reached their term limits. Teresa Mueller, who had been the Chamber treasurer since the inception and helped shape all the organization's fiscal policies and processes and Derek Vinge who

had served as the inaugural Vice-Chair, then Chair of the Board, and sat on numerous committees, including being the title sponsor of the annual Chamber Cup and several other signature events.

Incoming Chamber Chair Breeyan Edwards accepted the reigns of the position with a recognition of Pearson's work and crediting his "immeasurable guidance, dedication and commitment." She continued, saying "I'm very grateful to stand alongside so many people who care deeply about the future of the Estes Valley. When you look around this room, you can feel it — the passion, the grit, and the heart that make this business community what it is. This past year, our Chamber has shown what's possible when we move with intention. This momentum matters, because it proves that when we collaborate, we create real change. As we look ahead to 2026, my focus is on deepening that progress and expanding what's possible. My approach is simple: we move farther when we move together. Collaboration doesn't just strengthen our Chamber — it strengthens our economy, our workforce, and the quality of life we all share," she added.

Given the notable successes of 2025, the path forward for the Estes Chamber seems clear — they will be focusing on expanding programming and events, supporting business growth across all sectors, increasing their state and local advocacy work, and expanding their Economic Development & Workforce Council (EDWC) and Foundation activity impact.

The Chamber Foundation, a charitable division of the Chamber, is spearheaded by Harriette Woodard who gave an update on their work for 2026 — include new scholarships available for graduating seniors. Every dollar we steward, every program we support, is designed to keep our business community vibrant, resilient, and full of possibility. "The first scholarship," Woodard explained "will be in memory of Kent Smith, to be awarded annually to a qualified graduating high school senior. We also will be continuing our business-relief efforts and developing clear criteria for future support, though we sincerely hope our community never faces a situation where it's needed again," she added, referencing the traumatic loop construction and impact grants awarded to businesses that saw massive declines in revenue during the project.

The EDWC Chair, Christina Kraft, spoke in detail about the council's vision for 2026 — stirring the crowd with excitement and drumming up requests for more resources to support local businesses in the new year. "Economic Diversification will be a priority for us in 2026," Kraft said. "Reducing seasonal effects by broadening the economic base, providing support for entrepreneurs and small businesses, growing our reach in professional services, trades, and remote work, and expanding regional collaboration on emerging industries will be top of the list for the council," she added. "That's only a fraction of our goals, though — we will help our businesses to thrive by uniting the skillsets, experiences, and learnings of all of our local partners," Kraft added.

The State of Estes Park was not solely about the Chamber and EDWC though. A key component to both organizations and to the success of local businesses rests on local tourism. Visit Estes Park, therefore, gave an in-depth look at the value of tourism in Estes Park and it was quite eye-opening. "This past year, tourism generated over 3400 jobs," said CEO Sarah Leonard. "Direct travel-related spending resulted in more than \$510M and nearly \$29M in local tax revenue — that's 82% of our town tax revenue," she added. Seeing the numbers laid out so simple and clearly enhanced the attendees collective understanding of the importance of tourism, seasonal marketing, and business-to-business partnerships to maintain steady growth. Leonard also spotlighted major community developments including the Estes Arts District's Certification as a Colorado Creative District by the Colorado Creative Industries, a division of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, Colorado Tourism Office partnership with Wheel the World Accessibility Program, The Sundance Film Festival collaboration, The Stanley Chocolate Factory, The Stanley Film Center, and expansions at The Stanley Hotel. "These new developments enhance residents' quality of life, strengthen our local economy, and help ensure Estes Park remains a thriving, sustainable place to live and visit," she remarked. "They also bolster Estes Park's profile as a premier visitor destination with a thriving tourism economy offering meaningful arts, culture, and heritage experiences," she added.

Additional speakers for the day included Mayor Gary Hall who spoke about town projects including upcoming Trustee elections, new police department work and the need for new water purification facilities to replace our two aging plants, as well as Town environmental sustainability efforts, and trail buildouts. He also spoke about what makes the town “healthy” and the work being done to ensure Estes Park as a healthy fire department, school system, hospital, library, and sanitation system. He wrapped his remarks praising the civil discourse and neighborly support he has seen this year, during tough times and positive times, encouraging us all to rise above the fray and put our best selves forward every day to make Estes Park a great place to live, work, and play.

EDWC Update: Chair Honored as Volunteer of the Year



“The Chamber launched the EDWC with a small group of exceptional business leaders who were committed to building the resources and services that Estes Valley businesses needed to thrive – and with their immense skills, they have built an amazing organization,” said Chamber President Colleen DePasquale. “At the helm has been Christina Kraft, our guiding star, our cheerleader, and, now, our award-winning board chair,” she added. The Economic Development Council of Colorado (EDCC) presented the Volunteer of the Year Award to Christina Kraft during its annual Drive|Lead|Succeed Conference whose awards recognize excellence in economic development and celebrate leaders and communities shaping Colorado’s economic future.

As the EDCC said, “Kraft was recognized for her extraordinary dedication and leadership as a volunteer, building the foundation for a stronger, more effective economic development organization. Since 2015, she has played a pivotal role in guiding community economic development efforts, including eight years as Vice Chair of the predecessor organization, providing stability, expertise, and strategic vision.”

“Over the past 18 months, Christina has been instrumental in implementing strategic initiatives, including developing a new council charter, a five-pillar strategic plan covering Education, Funding, Business Retention & Expansion, Workforce, and Communication, and enhancing workforce programs such as local Hospitality training and the BASE program – and it’s wonderful to see her receiving recognition from beyond Estes Park, by others who notice and appreciate her efforts,” DePasquale added.

“Christina’s volunteer leadership exemplifies the power of dedication and community impact,” said Adam Kruegar, EDCC Board Chair. “Her commitment has strengthened the foundation of economic development in Colorado and inspired others to follow her lead.” “We are proud to honor Christina for her extraordinary contributions,” said Kim Woodworth, EDCC Executive Director. “Her vision, tenacity, and hands-on approach have created lasting benefits for communities across the state.”

“Christina’s hands-on leadership continues to provide direct economic development support to local businesses and communities across Colorado and we are excited to see what 2026 brings to the Estes Valley under her skilled watch,” concluded DePasquale.



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1 in 8 Colorado workers is an immigrant or refugee — and nearly half are still building their English skills. Are you tapping into this high-potential talent pool?

Through a partnership with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, EnGen offers fully funded, job-specific English training to Colorado employers.

WHY ENGLISH UPSKILLING?

- Engaged Employees 94% of workers improved their confidence in using English on the job.
- Higher Productivity 92% improved their job skills; 93% saved time at work.
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**Critical Deadline Approaching:
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State law requires that any Colorado business in operation for two or more

Are you ready to break into government contracting or strengthen your current strategy?

Colorado APEX Accelerator offers expert-led training designed to help businesses navigate the procurement process with confidence. From registrations to proposals, get the knowledge and support you need, at no cost to you.

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Leeds School of Business
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First Quarter Business Leaders Confidence Index (Survey)

Please take a few minutes to share your opinion about how the Colorado and U.S. economies and your industry will perform during the first and second quarters of 2026.

The LBCI gauges business leaders' opinions about national and state economic trends and how their industry will perform in the coming quarters. The survey will remain open through January 20th.

[Share Your Thoughts](#)

years with five or more employees to offer a retirement savings plan. The Colorado Department of the Treasury has been conducting outreach to educate businesses ahead of enforcement, which may result in fines next year.

To avoid these penalties and empower employees with a path to a secure financial future, businesses must either register for the no-cost Colorado Secure Savings Program or certify that they offer another qualified retirement plan.

[Learn More](#)



COLORADO
Department of Early Childhood

Essential Business Skills for Child Care Administrators

The e-learning program is now available and structured as a four-module, self-paced course which is uniquely enhanced by one-on-one business advising between each module to address and support your business's individual needs. This customized support is delivered through a partnership with the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) and the Colorado Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which is proud to offer no-cost, confidential one-on-one business advising and no- or low-cost training specifically designed for child care businesses.

[Learn More & Enroll](#)



Training & Upskilling Opportunities

AI Learning Lab: Strategic Planning

Tuesday, Dec 16, 2025

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

This learning lab is designed to present concepts, show examples and have you try out various activities. During the 1.5 hours session we will look at how AI can support your strategic planning in the following ways:

- Identifying objectives and priorities
- Defining tactics
- Determining timelines
- Identifying necessary resources and people

As we wrap up the year, it's an excellent time to prepare for the new year ahead. Come with an open mind to learn and try.

[Learn More](#)

Finance Friday: Accounting & Bookkeeping

Friday, Dec 19, 2025

2:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Are you ignoring the money side of your business? Don't leave this important area of your business for someone else to manage. Take control! Knowledge is power! Learn about all aspects of your business's accounting , from micro to macro, and stay on top of your finances. Every month, we discuss a different topic related to small business accounting that will help you with everything from managing your day-to-day bookkeeping to scaling your company and everything in between.

[Learn More](#)

Unstoppable Virtual Series: Navigating Change with Clarity & Courage

Thursday, Dec 18, 2025

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Don't miss Chalice's magnetic energy and inspiring presence!

Are you a business owner or entrepreneur who is navigating change and looking for ways to build resiliency. We believe most of our small business community falls into this category. Change is inevitable—but your response to it can be intentional. In this high-impact workshop, you'll uncover how your brain and body react to change, and learn practical tools to move through transitions with confidence, resilience, and clarity. Whether facing personal or organizational shifts, you'll leave empowered to lead yourself and others through change with curiosity, courage, and calm.

[Learn More](#)

Key Differences: W2 Employees & Independent Contractors

Wednesday, Dec 31, 2025

10:50 PM - 11:50 PM

This webinar is designed for businesses without an HR representative.

Demystify worker classification to ensure your business complies with state and federal labor law.

[Learn More](#)

Larimer County Updates



2026 TALENT SUMMIT

Early Registration: 2026 Talent Summit

Thursday, March 5

7:30 am - 12:00 pm

Pedersen Toyota Center

5280 Arena Cir Loveland, CO

NoCo Talent in Action: Regional Collaborations, Skill Building, and AI
The Talent Summit actively supports employers in attracting, recruiting and retaining the talent they need. The morning will focus on strengthening partnerships between employers, education, and government, human skills in AI, and connecting education to careers.

Educators, government agencies, businesses, and community providers are wanted for the vendor fair. We sell out early, don't wait!

[Learn More](#)



New Courses for Emerging Leaders in Architecture, Engineering & Construction

Check-out this comprehensive leadership development program is designed for new and emerging leaders in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (A/E/C) industries.

Running from November through April, the program equips participants with critical business, financial, and leadership skills necessary for success in today's competitive environment.

[Learn More](#)

EDWC Council Members

Christina Kraft, Bank of Colorado, Market President Estes Park, EDWC Chair
Bill Brown, Estes Park Town Trustee
Jason Damweber, Estes Park, Deputy Town Administrator
Adam Crowe, Larimer County, Economic Development Manager
Rebecca D. Gelsinger, Visit Estes Park, Director of Operations
Nick Smith, Lumpy Ridge Brewing, Owner
Val Thompson, Your Swag Squad
Kevin Benes, Running Wild Events
Peter Levine, Estes Park Housing Authority



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