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Commerce News

March 4, 2021

**Burgum appoints
James Leiman to lead
North Dakota
Department of
Commerce; Kessel to
serve as COO**



North Dakota Commerce Commissioner
James Leiman



North Dakota Commerce Deputy
Commissioner and COO Shawn Kessel

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Gov. Doug Burgum appointed James Leiman to serve as state Commerce Commissioner, citing his extensive background in enhancing organizations and his effective leadership as Commerce’s director of Economic Development and Finance (ED&F) since March 2018.

“James is a transformational leader and change agent who has made a tremendously positive impact on our state’s economy and business

climate during his tenure at the Department of Commerce. Under his highly capable leadership, the outstanding team at Commerce will continue to support economic growth and diversification, helping our state to emerge stronger than ever from the pandemic.” - Gov. Doug Burgum

Burgum expressed his deepest appreciation for Deputy Commerce Commissioner Shawn Kessel, who has served as interim commerce commissioner since former Commissioner Michelle Kommer returned to the private sector in October. Kessel, a past Dickinson city administrator and past president of the Western Dakota Energy Association, North Dakota League of Cities and North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund, will continue at Commerce as deputy commissioner and chief operating officer.

“Shawn has done an outstanding job as interim commissioner and, true to his professionalism, he encouraged the search for a new commissioner and supported James as the choice for commissioner. As deputy and COO, Shawn will continue to work closely with James and drive future

success for the agency and North Dakota's economy and citizens. With their combined experience as city administrators, they understand the importance of the Main Street Initiative's pillars of building healthy, vibrant communities with smart, efficient infrastructure that can attract and compete for a 21st century workforce, especially as the pandemic has exponentially expanded opportunities to work and build careers remotely. These MSI principles are now more important than ever in our fight to reduce property taxes and diversify our economy." - Burgum

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Second round of grant geared for the

hospitality sector begins next week



Hospitality Economic
Resiliency Grant PLUS

Application window opens March 9 and closes April 1

Round Two

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\$20 million in grant funds are available for round two of the Hospitality Economic Resiliency Grant PLUS, which will be open for applications on March 9 at 10 a.m. CST.

"North Dakota's lodging sector lost more than \$178 million in visitor

spending in 2020 with demand continuing at depressed levels to start off 2021. These businesses are vital to our communities for visitors and the local workforce and supporting business." - Interim Commerce Commissioner Shawn Kessel

The Hospitality Economic Resiliency Grant PLUS expands the Hospitality Economic Resiliency Grant (HERG) to provide funding for the accommodation sector, which includes hotels, motels, lodges and resort establishments. The Hospitality Economic Resiliently Grant PLUS is intended to assist the state's hotels, motels and lodging businesses that have been impacted by loss of revenue due to low occupancy rates as a result of the pandemic.

Eligible facilities may apply for up to \$40,000. Applicants with more than one facility may apply for up to \$80,000 with maximum of \$40,000 to be used per location. Grant recipients are required to comply with ND Smart Restart protocols.

Recipients of the first round of the Hospitality Economic Resiliency Grant PLUS may be eligible for round two funds if the recipient received less than the full eligible amount. In this case, the recipient may be eligible for the difference between the two rounds, up the maximum distribution allowed per grant. Different expenses from round one

reimbursements must be submitted to receive round two funds.

[Learn more here](#)



Community Services

Commerce employee to receive Jean Diggs Weatherization Champion Award

Weatherization Assistance Program Manager Bruce Hagen has been selected to receive the Jean Diggs Weatherization Champion Award on

behalf of the members of the National Association for State Community Service Programs (NASCSPP).

“We are very pleased to have one of our very own team members be selected for this prestigious award. This is a true reflection of Bruce’s tireless commitment to serving the residents of North Dakota.” - Commerce Division of Community Services Director Bonnie Malo

Meet Cortnee Jensen, Commerce's newest aerospace/UAS development manager



Cortnee has been part of team Commerce for almost two years as a member of the ED&F team. Cortnee is now responsible for helping grow the aerospace/UAS sector by recruiting new companies to North Dakota, helping existing companies expand, and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation. She works with companies and entrepreneurs to determine their needs, assist local partners in preparing information, arrange and conduct site tours, and serves as a liaison with economic development partners.

Cortnee will also continue her work as the university research and economic developer, where she serves as a bridge between academics and businesses to solve real world problems that can be commercialized, as well as identify research that would create value for companies.

"The most rewarding part of my work is the continued opportunity to work with community-minded, growth-focused partners. After living in six states, I can say without hesitation that the people of North Dakota are the most accessible and collaborative that I have met." -Cortnee

Cortnee lives in Fargo with her husband and three children and works throughout the entire state. Cortnee started her career as cardiovascular genetic researcher and worked her way into economic development with interesting career detours as a radio personality and ball room dancing instructor. In her free time, Cortnee creates art jewelry, travels internationally, and still dances whenever the opportunity arises.

Vantis Expands: Building out the drone industry in North Dakota

Vantis, North Dakota's statewide unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) network, is expanding and with it, North Dakota's drone ecosystem.

Now, the new Vantis Mission and Network Operations Center (MNOC) will be housed at the Grand Sky business and aviation park.

"The MNOC is an essential component of Vantis. As the name suggests, it is the focal point to provide secure network operations monitoring and administration, customer coordination and support, performance and safety data reporting and other critical functions," - Vantis press release

[Click here to read more](#)

Marketing-Tourism

Weathering the storm: tourism took a hit and responded to changing travel habits in 2020

While COVID-19 took a big bite out of traditional travel, new opportunities arose to serve a traveling public starving for safe and spacious outdoor recreation. The 2020 annual report details the impact of coronavirus and North Dakota Tourism's creative approach to marketing the state as the perfect place to reconnect and rejuvenate.

See how North Dakota Tourism revised its marketing strategy to promote safe travel during the height of the pandemic.

[Click here for the 2020 Annual Report](#)

Tourism Industry Chat March 15

You and your colleagues are invited to join the next North Dakota Tourism Industry update call on March 15 at 2 p.m. CST. This presentation will feature a legislative update, updates on recovery assistance and the latest data and trends on travel and visitor spending in North Dakota.

These presentations are open to anyone in North Dakota's travel and tourism industry. You are welcome to forward the log-in information to colleagues. We also share updates for future calls in our Tourism Industry Newsletter and on our website at: www.NDtourism.com/tourism-industry. If you are unable to join, a recording of the presentation will be [available here](#) on our website.

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Main Street

Eight North Dakota communities selected to receive Main Street Initiative Partners in Planning Grant funds

Commerce today announced that eight communities were selected to receive funding for round two of the Main Street Initiative (MSI) Partners in Planning (PiP) Grant with more than \$122,000 to be awarded.

“These awards reflect the inspiration and drive that North Dakota communities possess. We look forward to seeing these projects come to fruition creating smart infrastructure development, smarter community growth and workforce development.” - Commerce Commissioner James Leiman

The following grant applicants were recommended to receive an award.

- Argusville – \$23,400
- Bismarck – \$7,552
- Divide County – \$4,786.80
- Grand Forks – \$15,600
- Mandan – \$23,400
- Minot – \$19,500
- Dickinson – \$23,400
- Wishek – \$4,626
- **Total – \$122,264.80**

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MAIN STREET ND

2021 INITIATIVE



In the News



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