

Bowman braces for the boom

By: [Bryan Horwath](#), The Dickinson Press | Published August 17, 2013

BOWMAN — During a recent summer day on the prairie in southwest North Dakota, the city of Bowman sat much like it has for decades.

A little more than a three-hour drive from the Black Hills of South Dakota, Bowman is situated along Highway 85 — a roadway that makes motorists shudder closer to Bakken oil country — and represents, by nearly all accounts, most of the positive stereotypes of what small-town America is supposed to represent.

Bowman is a friendly place where people greet each other on the sidewalk, ask about one another's kids and value living in a community where people pitch in to help when neighbors are in need.

Inside the Lasting Visions flower and coffee shop — owned by Bowman City Commission President Lyn James — talk centered around what could be coming Bowman's way in the future: a lot of oil industry development.

"You need to plan for what could come," James said. "We've visited with officials in the know at the Capitol in Bismarck and they have told us to gear up and be ready. There is a prediction for a large company to do (carbon) recapture here, which involves an influx of temporary workers."

The company James spoke of is Denbury Resources, a publically traded oil and gas corporation that recently purchased a large swath of land in eastern Montana and North Dakota with the intent of ramping up carbon dioxide cycling and output in the area in the coming years.

Denbury spokesman Ernesto Alegria said it's too early to speculate exactly what that might mean for the city of Bowman and Bowman County, but added that such operations could be up and running by 2017.

Unlike some other comparable North Dakota Oil Patch communities that have been completely swept up by the Bakken energy play, Bowman — a city with less than 2,000 residents — has had time to plan.

"We have the luxury of some time to plan," James said. "I don't think Bowman is ever going to be as busy as a Watford City, but we're definitely preparing. We're seeing an increase in land being leased and other indicators. (In June), I talked to a guy who leased his entire place."

Bowman County Development Corporation Executive Director Teran Doerr said residents in Bowman want to take advantage of development opportunities — pointing to Bowman's strong standing with Vision West ND, an economic sustainability project encompassing the 19 oil- and gas-producing counties in western North Dakota — while still maintaining the city and county's rural charm.

"Of all the communities they've worked with, the people with Vision West said they were amazed with Bowman because of the potential for what we could do here," Doerr said. "We have a lot of people willing to get involved and get things done. The people here are also very proud of this community and what we have. People see that we have a lot to offer here."

Though no one would mistake Bowman for an overrun oil community like Watford City, or even the likes of Killdeer, the signs of growth are clearly evident.

A new hardware store, a Subway restaurant, plans for a revamped travel center with added gas pumps, a new hotel and other projects are popping up around town and all point toward Bowman's expansion.

A few years ago, Pifer's Auction & Realty President Kevin Pifer was looking for a site for a new regional hub for the business he helps run. He said Bowman stood out as a prime community. Last year, Pifer's opened its new western North Dakota headquarters just north of town along Highway 85.

"We viewed Bowman as just a great business climate," Pifer said. "It's a place that has a very diverse economy when you talk about agriculture, livestock, cropping and energy development — all of which are prominent in Bowman.

"All those diverse markets were really attractive to us and the excellent leadership there at the city and county level also was really enticing to us. It's not Dickinson or Williston, but it's a very attractive market for its own unique reasons."

With an eye toward the future, Bowman also has a new airport under construction and is moving forward in the process for a \$25 million revamping of its hospital and clinic, said Southwest Healthcare Services Marketing Director Allison Engelhart, who added that construction could begin by summer 2014 if funding goes according to plan.

Staying ahead of the energy development game also means tackling housing concerns, which Bowman took a step toward doing with an announcement earlier this year of an apartment complex with 14 units in the process of being completed.

"We are very mindful of staying ahead of the game," James said. "At the city level, we're working hard to keep our staff because it can be pretty enticing to go out and make money in the oil field. Workforce is a concern, but, hopefully, housing will take care of some of that."

Now in her 10th year as Bowman's mayor, James — who greets customers coming and going in her shop by name — said she's more excited than ever about what's happening in her blossoming community.

"Each year gets more challenging, I will say that," James said. "But it's in a good way. If you don't embrace challenge and change, you go backwards."