



A Message from the Director

by Patricia Virgen, Executive Director

As we step into Spring, I am excited to share the incredible momentum we have built and the promising opportunities ahead for San Joaquin County. This year, we are expanding our commitment to economic growth, workforce development, and community support through a series of new programs funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

We are proud to launch new initiatives supporting local businesses and workforce development through ARPA funding. The Shop San Joaquin-Open Rewards program encourages local spending by offering customers cashback rewards at eligible businesses, helping to support and strengthen the regional economy. In partnership with the San Joaquin Small Business Development Center, Learn to Certify helps small businesses become bid-ready, while the Youth Entrepreneurship Incubator offers workshops and pitch events for young entrepreneurs. Our collaboration with the Family Resource & Referral Center of San Joaquin expands family childcare homes, provides specialized training, and supports informal caregivers in becoming licensed providers. Through HealthForce Partners, we offer up to \$2,500 annually for 35 local students pursuing healthcare careers, including hands-on training and stroke care education. Additionally, the San Joaquin County Spark Relief Grant provides up to \$5,000 to reimburse utility expenses for small businesses affected by COVID-19 through the LIFT Initiative. Through our partnership with the Downtown Stockton Alliance, the Facade Enhancement Grant program provides funding to help local businesses improve the appearance of their commercial storefronts.

Our Economic Development team successfully finalized the San Joaquin County 2025-2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) approved by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. This strategy will guide our efforts to support local initiatives and foster growth. We also held our first Advanced Manufacturing Employer Roundtable to align with the North Valley Thrive regional initiative, identifying workforce needs and priorities.

In February 2025, we hosted a highly successful Amazon job fair, attracting 917 attendees despite the rainy weather. Amazon's expansion in Stockton will create 1,600 new jobs for our community. We are also excited to announce that we have obtained a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor for the National Farmworker Jobs Program. This program will help farm workers, and their dependents acquire necessary skills to either stabilize or advance in their agricultural jobs or obtain employment in new industries. Additionally, the program aims to increase access to safe and sanitary housing to assist migrant and seasonal farm workers and their dependents with achieving their education and career goals, which can lead to improved economic mobility.

We continue to proudly serve the Lodi and Tracy communities, and we're excited to announce some recent developments! Our Lodi location is now co-located with the Lodi Chamber of Commerce, enhancing our ability to serve the community more efficiently. In addition, we've opened a new office in Tracy in partnership with the Housing Authority. These new locations will make it easier than ever for residents to access resources and take advantage of our employment services right within their own communities.

I am incredibly proud of the work we have accomplished and the partnerships that make these programs possible. Together, we will continue to support the residents and businesses of San Joaquin County, fostering a thriving and resilient community.

Here's to a year of growth and opportunity!