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Canyon growth still robust

Mike Butts
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CALDWELL — At Tuesday's State of the County Address, county commissioners lauded gains they said the county has made that will improve services and save money.

The event at Jewett Auditorium at The College of Idaho drew about 80 people.

The State of the County program ended with the auction of a classic Schwinn bicycle to raise money for the Hope's Door family shelter in Caldwell. Sheriff Chris Smith won the bike for $750.

Commissioner Matt Beebe said growth slowed in the county in 2007. But the county still saw a population increase of 4.5 percent.

"We are still nowhere near what we used to consider 'normal', " Beebe said about growth.

Beebe said before the address that the year had been difficult because of the weakening of the economy. But commissioners named several efforts made to save taxpayer dollars during the address.

Improvements in building inspection, such as remote wireless equipment, will reduce tax dollars used for those services by as much as 30 percent, Commissioner David Ferdinand said.

Ferdinand also talked about the county's new Web site, which should be up later this year.

"The site will be user-friendly, have the ability for county residents to do business online, renew vehicle registration online (and) fill out paperwork for a building permit online while also paying for services," Ferdinand said.

The new site will also integrate with Google Maps to show polling locations, saving thousands of phone calls to the county elections office, Ferdinand said.

As part of the program, Sheriff Chris Smith presented a check for $17,550 to Idaho drug czar Debbie Field for the Idaho Meth Project. The money was donated by Sheriff's Office employees.

Of the county's about 700 employees, 118 of them have been employed by the county for 15 years or more, Commissioner Steve Rule said. A list of those employees was on display during the program.

The county is preparing to build a jail holding facility near the Notus Exit on Interstate 84 for about $7.8 million, Beebe said. The county has also purchased the former Department of Labor building on Graye Lane for motor vehicle and driver's license offices, which commissioners say will save the county money in lease costs.

The State of the County event also honored local developer Greg Bullock for his help in saving access to a local fishing spot, and Caldwell High student Brooke Garcia for pulling a 3-year-old boy from a burning car earlier this month.