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Bureau of Business and Economic Research

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations

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Some Montanans—tots in nursery school, maybe, or sheepherders who seldom get to town—may never have heard of the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of Montana. But all Montanans are affected by what the bureau does.

Established in 1948 as the research arm of the School of Business Administration, the bureau gathers, analyzes and disseminates information about state issues and problems in economics and business. Because those issues and problems, directly or indirectly, touch the lives of everybody in the state, everybody benefits from a better understanding of them.

Maxine C. Johnson, director of the bureau, heads a staff that includes professionals who specialize in regional economic research, forest-product industry research, survey research, and other fields. Some bureau researchers study state and local economic trends; some are experts on public opinion surveys; others are authorities on timber resource use. Together they cover the gamut of business and economic issues faced by the state.

Every year the bureau analyzes the state economy and also the economies of several Montana cities. The results are presented at public Economic Outlook Seminars each winter in the cities studied.

The bureau and the Great Falls Tribune co-sponsor the Montana Poll, a quarterly survey that gauges public opinion on economic and political issues. This reading of the public pulse is widely reported in the media.
The information that comes out of the Economic Outlook Seminars and the Montana Poll, along with that from other bureau projects, is published in the Montana Business Quarterly.

The Quarterly, which has been published by the bureau for more than 20 years, won the first publications award given by the Association of Business and Economics Research (AUBER), in 1983. The magazine was judged superior in overall quality, writing and editing, content and layout.

The AUBER award is presented to the outstanding periodical in business and economic research within the association. AUBER has more than 150 member economic and business research units representing colleges and universities in six countries and 44 states.

On June 20, 1983, the bureau entered into a contract with the Montana Department of Commerce to develop and operate a Montana Economic Reporting and Forecasting System. To avoid the acronym MERFS, the Bureau refers to the system as Economics Montana. The agreement calls for regular briefing of state government officials by Bureau staff and other Montana University System economists.

Economics Montana is part of the "Build Montana" program set in motion in 1983 by executive and legislative action. It represents a joint effort of the Montana University System and state government to provide public and private decision makers with current economic information and forecasts of future economic conditions.

The project is headquartered in the bureau offices on the UM campus. Paul E. Polzin, a UM business professor and a bureau researcher, heads the reporting and forecasting system. Economists from UM, Montana State University, Bozeman, (more)
and Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology, Butte, are cooperating in its development.

Bureau Director Johnson was instrumental in bringing Economics Montana into being. She sees it as a natural extension of the service and research the bureau has been performing for Montana for nearly four decades.

"The forecasting system doesn't fundamentally change our function, but it broadens our scope," she says. "We think we can use our research experience and knowledge of Montana to build a forecasting system that will give policy makers some of the information they need to make wise decisions about matters that affect us all."