

Citizen voice in community planning

Whether a major employer closes, growth reaches 2,400 percent or new volunteer citizens need leadership training, Nevada's call on University of Nevada Cooperative Extension expertise to help with community development.

WHEN BOOM GOES BUST

When southern Nevada's Mohave Generating Station closed last year — a major employer with more than \$20 million in payroll — it eliminated 350 jobs with an average wage of \$70,000 a year.

The area faced a potential economic disaster, according to Buddy Borden, Cooperative Extension economic development specialist. He had already been working in southern Nevada with University of Arizona Cooperative Extension helping the Colorado River region develop a comprehensive community economic development plan.

"These are the most progressive communities I've ever worked with," Borden says. "What Cooperative Extension does is far from traditional classroom teaching — we help community leaders and citizens make educated decisions and become self-sufficient."

Borden and Tom Harris, Cooperative Extension community development specialist, helped the community apply for an economic adjustment development planning grant, and then assisted in planning to mitigate the economic loss of jobs.

"Rural communities are often strapped for funds and looking for efficiencies," Borden says. "They cannot afford to chase a business without knowing whether there is a fit. We offered them a way to match community desires to business needs."

As part of the Mohave plant project, Borden and Harris offered the new Community Business Matching program that is being pilot tested in Montana, Hawai'i, New Mexico, Nevada and Wyoming.

"With the Community Business Matching program, we gathered lots of community input," Borden explains. "Over two days, focus groups presented thought provoking ideas about the trade-offs between economic development and community resources."

Followed by a telephone survey of 3,000 businesses across the country in 80 private sectors, they are using the survey results and matching business needs with



Lincoln County tourism photos by Don Shanks of Pioche

Stone Cabin Trail in Spring Valley State Park

citizens' wishes to create a desirability index. Once completed, that will direct communities in attracting businesses with matching goals.



A contest was held for elementary school children to draw pictures of their favorite things to do in Lincoln County. The contest promoted awareness and pride in Lincoln County's natural assets.

POPULATION GROWTH

Nearby Lincoln County is facing a vastly different problem. A projected 2,400 percent growth rate — unprecedented in the United States — means the county is struggling to expand its governing system and concerned about the future of its treasured rural lifestyle.

"Lincoln County residents cherish their quiet lifestyle, yet they want enough jobs to keep their young people here," says Holly Gatzke, Cooperative Extension educator for Lincoln County. "Fear of change and lack of knowledge and communication often inhibits the planning process, especially in a rural community that has changed little over the years and suddenly faces phenomenal growth."

While Borden and Harris help county commissioners and staff plan for upcoming growth, Gatzke helped develop an

enthusiastic new group called the Lincoln Communities Action Team. She facilitated the team meetings as residents began to find common goals. Using Cooperative Extension's interactive videoconferencing for meetings cut travel time and involved more people.

Rural tourism is the solution team members agreed to pursue. This fall several communities are scheduling day-long events with historically based activities geared for families.

"Better communication revealed that we already have great attractions and combining them might entice tourists to stay longer," Gatzke says. "With advance notice, businesses can better plan to serve tourists."

WHO WILL LEAD?

Training civic leaders is an educational program also offered by Marlene Rebori, Cooperative Extension's western area community and organizational development specialist. Her six-week training, originally designed for Washoe County Citizens Advisory Board members, is now available to all volunteer members of the county's boards and

commissions and has expanded to other Nevada communities including Fallon and Carson City.

"In business, you do things one way," says John Jackson Sr., Washoe County volunteer on the Sun Valley Citizens Advisory Board. "In government, you do things another way.

Marlene's training was very in-



Holly Gatzke.



Buddy Borden.

formative and taught us how to do things the way government requires and still use each person's experience." Jackson especially appreciated learning how to run a meeting effectively and stick to the agenda, a requirement of Nevada's open meeting laws.

Cooperative Extension's engaged leadership program teaches skills in working with the government and the public, decision-making, time and meeting management, conflict management, leadership characteristics and facilitation skills. Also, Michael Havercamp, Cooperative Extension's group facilitation and mediation specialist, leads one session on community visioning and action planning.

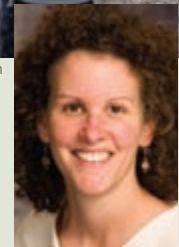
"The course reviews have always been top notch," says Bob Webb, planning manager with the Washoe County Department of Community Development. In addition, Rebori works with individual advisory board members and teaches an introductory session during the county's new citizen advisory board member orientation.

"Two main objectives of the Engaged Leadership program are for citizen volunteers to gain a sense of efficacy, that their engagement in the community will have an impact, and civic skills so that participants acquire the building blocks to engage effectively," Rebori says. **N**



Photos Courtesy of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

Pyramid Lake teens use a GPS unit to build a community pathway. At right, Marlene Rebori, Cooperative Extension community and organization development specialist.



Pyramid youth civic engagement

In the face of a national crisis in civic engagement, Marlene Rebori, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension community and organization development specialist, started addressing the problem locally by teaching youth at Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation northeast of Reno.

"Youth today are disconnecting at a higher rate than previous generations," she explained. "Civic habits are formed during the early teen years, so we only have a small window of opportunity to influence how engaged the future generation will be."

Rebori teamed up with Dehan Dominguez, Cooperative Extension's community-based instructor at Pyramid Lake Paiute Reservation. Rebori and Dominguez recruited seven Pyramid Lake Junior-Senior High School students to join an after school program. They loosely modeled their program after an international program, Project Citizen, which is a five-step program where youth:

- identify a problem in their community
- gather and evaluate information on the problem
- examine and evaluate alternative solutions
- develop a proposed public policy to address the problem, and
- create an action plan to get their policy adopted by government.

The teens at Pyramid Lake identified six public issues and voted to work on a paved pathway that was needed through their community. The students developed a questionnaire and interviewed representatives from each group along the walkway to determine and develop community support. Results showed that everyone was supportive of the idea, so the students began planning the actual physical location of the walkway, using survey wheels and GPS units to map the proposed 1.25-mile path.