

The Future of Winnemucca

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New HGH CEO Art Frable (left) speaks in one of six panels representing the businesses, community and local government of Winnemucca and Humboldt County.

Also pictured: Humboldt County Manager Dave Mendiola and Winnemucca City Manager/Engineer Alicia Heiser. Mark Evatz (at podium), representing Newmont Mining, emceed Thursday morning's event.

Members of Winnemucca-area business, community and government sectors converged on the Boys & Girls Club of Winnemucca Thursday morning for a peek into the future of the city.

Winnemucca Futures featured representatives of:

- local government
- mining and industry
- civic and tourism
- education and youth
- business and local development
- economic development

Speakers kept to a strict five-minute span to talk about the current status of their organizations and their potential for the future. Attendees also asked questions once the panelists finished their remarks.

Local government

Some new faces graced the stage this year. Humboldt General Hospital CEO Art Frable spoke about the future of the hospital and predictions for the healthcare industry.

Alicia Heiser, Winnemucca's new city manager/engineer, shared six tactics the city can use to improve.

County Manager Dave Mendiola explained the county's role as conduit for business. "Our job is to pave the way to make it as easy as possible to do business in Humboldt County," he said.

In response to a question about challenges each entity faces, all three panelists pointed to funding.

Mining and industry

Representatives from the three big regional mines talked about the future of the industry here and what their companies focus on. Mark Evatz from Newmont Phoenix Mine said both Phoenix Mine and Twin Creeks have plans to expand. Twin Creeks has started an underground mine.

Andrew Sholty from Barrick Turquoise Ridge described plans to sink a third shaft starting in August 2018. Turquoise Ridge currently has one shaft for mining and a second for ventilation. Schulte described Barrick's focus on innovation and technology to create a safer work environment. This focus on technology will bring in more technical jobs.

Brian Korinek from SSR Marigold described how the mine uses economy of scale. Marigold is waiting for approval of a permit to increase the size and depth of the current pits. Marigold is also conducting an equipment replacement study to determine the most economical way to mine the deposit.

The panelists said they would like to see supply chain and network infrastructure businesses in the area.

Civic and tourism

Debbie Stone said the Humboldt County Chamber of Commerce welcomed an average of 500 visitors and 150 telephone calls per month. The Chamber fields a variety of questions regarding community events, restaurant recommendations, employment and property taxes and helps visitors and callers find the information they need.

Rhonda Coleman described how the Rotary Club supported the community through service like literacy support kits for Humboldt County kindergarten students and home kits for individuals leaving a domestic violence program. Rotary Club's golf tournament, held in May, is the club's major fundraiser. Funds go to community youth scholarships.

Winnemucca Convention and Visitors Authority Chairman Terry Boyle said travel has been a foundation of the city's economy since the time of the California Trail. He said room tax revenue has trended upward for the past few years. He added that the number of hotel rooms booked during peak summer months usually equals four times that of January. WCVA helps even out the difference by encouraging tourism in the slower months through events like rodeos and "out of the box" events like indoor archery shoots and horseshoe tournaments.

Education and youth

Dr. Amber Donnelly, dean of Health Science and Human Services at Great Basin College, spoke about the future of the Winnemucca campus. The college is raising funds to match a pledge from the Pennington Foundation for a new building. The building will house the successful nursing and paramedic programs, as well as an electrical program. A new bachelor in biology can feed into the medical program at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Assistant Superintendent Dawn Hagness described how Humboldt County School District (HCSD) is preparing for the future. She said that times and students are changing, so teaching and learning have to change as well. Thanks to grant money, the students and teachers at Winnemucca Junior High School will receive Chromebook laptops next year. HCSD is also expanding its Advanced Placement program and finding innovative ways to encourage students to explore science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) career fields through classes like robotics and medical detectives.

Chad Peters, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of Winnemucca, said the club has an average of 90 kids per day. The club also provides opportunities for rural schools, such as a program to bring rural students to the facility once per month for STEM activities. Peters also said the club wants to help older students explore professions and is looking into hosting a college showcase. The club's soccer complex will also bring in business to the community.

Business and development

Fernando Lopez, operations manager at Diamond Plastics in Golconda, provided some history of the business and plans for the future. Diamond Plastics produces PVC pipes for water, sewer and irrigation as well as SuperDuct for the mining industry. Lopez mentioned a study underway for an expansion at the Golconda facility. Diamond Plastics is also funding and undertaking a pipeline extension to the Golconda water system.

Mike Sheppard, president of Michael Clay Corporation, gave an update on the hospital and arena projects. He added that Winnemucca is a great place to retire, due to the support facilities for aging populations. He also complimented the "collaborative spirit" between the City of Winnemucca and Humboldt County that benefits business and development.

Scott Carriere, president of CarWil, LLC, discussed expansion plans and moving the Elko facility back to Winnemucca.

Economic Development

Jan Morrison, economic development Officer for Northeastern Nevada Regional Development Authority (NNRDA), described economic development as a “three-legged stool.” Economic Development Authorities, the community and local government make up one leg each. She added later that the majority of the region’s economic development will come from people who want to relocate to Winnemucca to take advantage of tax breaks.

Sheldon Mudd, new executive director of NNRDA, suggested focusing on three areas: creation of homegrown business, business development and business recruitment, or bringing business into the region. He said the NNRDA supports communities in these three areas. He encouraged strategic planning and said there’s a lot of interest in Winnemucca from several companies, but there’s also a lot of competition from other states.

Patrick Gray, president of Humboldt Development Authority, said the HDA wants to see a “diverse economy that results in shared abundance for all stakeholders and all involved in our community.” It focuses on developing the next generation of business and community leaders as well as building the foundation that will help business thrive.