**Winnemucca Futures explores challenges, solutions during annual event**

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Northeastern Nevada Development Authority Economic Development Officer Jan Morrison welcomes forum participants and panelists to the annual Winnemucca Futures event on January 30, 2020.

Editor’s Note: The annual **Winnemucca Futures** economic development forum took place on Jan. 30, and featured Humboldt County’s industry and government leaders. What follows is the first of a four-part series.

“Today will be the most valuable morning that you will spend this year,” said Humboldt Development Authority Board Member, Event MC and Winnemucca Business Owner Harold Gudmundsen as an introduction to the 2020 **Winnemucca Futures** Event.

**Winnemucca Futures** 2020 highlighted the advancements and trajectory of Humboldt County’s government, industries and education. More than 165 people attended the event, held at the Boys & Girls Club in Winnemucca on Jan. 30.

The annual event is produced by the Northeastern Nevada Regional Development Authority (NNRDA) and presented by the Humboldt Development Authority, the economic development agency formed by a cooperative agreement between the city of Winnemucca and Humboldt County.

The event featured 21 speakers in a fast-paced series of panels and topics which charts the year ahead and includes the following topics: government and infrastructure, education and youth, workforce and housing, area businesses, mining industry, cleantech and renewable energy and economic development initiatives.

Each panelist had approximately five minutes to talk and there were seven panels separated by sections.
“**Winnemucca Futures** encourages community growth, shares business intelligence, and busts some of the myths about rural economic development,” said the event pamphlet.

NNRDA Economic Development Officer Jan Morrison said the NNRDA spans from Pershing County to White Pine County and is one of several regional development authorities in the state, focusing on economic development and community capacity building.

**Workforce and Housing**

Morrison kicked off this portion of **Winnemucca Futures** with a snapshot of what Humboldt County can expect over the next five years in terms of employment numbers.

“Talking about jobs coming to the Humboldt County area,” Morrison said. “And when we’re really talking about a region. This does include Lander County and Pershing [County]. Employment doesn’t know any boundaries in our area. So, the next five years surveying major employers, we have 1,500 new jobs. These are not attrition. These are new jobs coming to our area.”

Morrison went on to add that for every primary job there is at least one corresponding secondary job. These secondary jobs can include employment in retail, services such as barbers, and jobs that support the primary industries such as suppliers and vendors.

“When these people come in, we want them to bring their families coming to our community and settling here ... buy or rent homes.” Morrison said that the region will need a variety of homes including apartments, rentals, townhomes, detached, attached and mobile homes. But the region needs the workforce to build those homes.

Morrison said that the myth regarding housing and workforce is that rural communities have the same issues as the urban areas. While that may be true for workforce shortages, that’s not necessarily true for how building projects are established and completed.  “Rural development is far more flexible, far less layered, less costly, and takes far less time. We’re pretty innovative out here; we do what is needed.”
Morrison explained the rural areas use sequential parceling maps, control is local, responsive and enthusiastic to help develop new projects. “What that means is when you work with our regional planning staff, your turn-around time from submission to building is easily less than a year. In some cases, ... it could simply be a couple of months.”

Denise Castle of JOIN, Inc. discussed how her organization is working with regional and local partners to develop workforce development programs.

Locally, we partner with DETR and Great Basin College with a target audience of 17 to 117-year-olds who are interested in career development training. Castle announced that the organization is launching an in-school youth K-12 engagement program called Career Bound NV which is a work-based learning model.
“The goal of the program is to engage students as early as the fourth grade to talk about career exploration,” Castle said. “We have been working locally with community members for the past six to eight months, developing and identifying in-demand careers that are needed to be filled for the local area.”

Aaron West, CEO of Nevada Builders Alliance spoke about the need for a skilled labor force to meet future demands especially for construction industry.

“Construction workforce is not just an issue here,” West said. “It’s statewide; it’s nationwide. Some projections show we need about 3 million construction workers over the next 10 years nationwide.  At the state level, we’ve drilled that number down to about 100,000 over the next five years. The challenge is this. We have 25% of our workforce is over the age of 55, and only 6% is under the age of 24.” West added that wages for skilled trades such as plumbers and electricians is over $100,000 and is the highest wage in the state for similar work. “So, the Nevada initiative spurs proposals for 2,000 housing units unity is real and we just need to get that message out” to potential workers who are interested in this type of work.