**Community leaders discuss growth, challenges at Winnemucca Futures**

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Humboldt County School District Superintendent Dave Jensen, Great Basin College Winnemucca Center Director Lisa Campbell and Boys and Girls Club of Winnemucca Executive Director Chad Peters present information about education and youth in Winnemucca.

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 fourth of a four-part series.  
  
**Education and Youth**  
The Education and Youth panel at the **Winnemucca Futures** 2020 discussed the successes, challenges and what the future holds in education and youth development in Humboldt County. The panel included Chad Peters, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club of Winnemucca; Lisa Campbell, Director Great Basin College, Winnemucca Center; Dr. Dave Jensen, Humboldt County School District Superintendent.

Chad Peters kicked off the discussion with a run-down of the Boys & Girls Club of Winnemucca. The club is the fifth largest club in Nevada, serving over 500 children. “Because of the mine shifts and the way the community works,” Peters said, “we average over 130 kids a day [and] average over 100 kids in the summer.”

Out of the 130 kids that attend daily, 65% of those kids are on some level of financial assistance. Peters said the goal of the club is to provide a safe place and a meal to all children.

In 2019, the club served over 27,563 meals which included one meal after school during the school year, and a breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack for 10 weeks in the summer. The club was also asked to take over the federal food program which occurs during summer break. Peters said that in 2019 the club served over 3,000 lunches for 10 weeks in the park for ages 0 to 18.

Lisa Campbell discussed Great Basin College’s role in education and developing programs that meet the needs of today’s workforce. “We serve 3,800 students from all parts of Nevada, across the United States and international as well.” Campbell said the college offers over 90 degree programs.

But the college also faces financial challenges as a result of the 2019 Nevada legislative session reducing the college's budget. Campbell said the college tackles reduced funding by increasing enrollment. Each

semester, the college sees 350 to 400 students enroll in classes. The current student body for all campuses stands at 3,400.

Campbell highlighted what the next year will bring particularly the new Health and Technology building. The construction of the building will double the college’s footprint. The building will house the electrical program, certified paramedic program and the certified nursing program. The college has been able to raise over $7 million dollars for construction and expects to break ground in the fall of 2020.

“That's our goal,” Campbell said, “[to] train, educate, and support local employment needs and in turn, economic development. We have capacity to grow; we provide teachers, nurses, electrical technicians, computer skills and that's all achievable in this community.”

Humboldt County School District Superintendent Dr. Dave Jensen reported on what the district is doing to meet the needs of students and the future needs of employers.

“As we recognize the needs of our community, we have an obligation to provide a workforce for our community,” Jensen said. The district has very strong career and technology programs in partnerships with organizations like JOIN, Inc and Great Basin College. “We've got quite a few of our students participating in the electrical program [at Great Basin College]. … We’re look to expand those because we want to make sure we generate employees from Humboldt County that stay in Humboldt County.”  
Jensen also discussed programs in which students can gain work experience. “In partnerships with organizations like JOIN,” Jensen says, “the school will offer internships for students with participating local businesses, and the partnership with Great Basin College — we are working toward [offering] students [graduating] high school with an associate [degree] combined.”

The district is also looking to implement a personalized learning structure. ”[We] recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all for students.”

Jensen said the district does have the capacity to grow as the county population and economy grow. “In 1998, Humboldt County School District served 4,200 students; we're currently at 3,400” which reflected a downturn in the economy.   
  
**Government and Infrastructure**  
“Government's role in economic development is to provide the essential and nonessential services and spaces that attract and retain businesses and their employees.” said Winnemucca City Manager/Engineer Alicia Heiser. “And so by essential services I mean like water sewer, streets, some of the things that maybe not everybody appreciates; and the nonessential is more our parks and recreation, swimming pools, courses, things like that.”

Heiser said that all of those services must grow as a city or community grows. In 2019 the city had four large commercial projects including a new Maverik, Love’s, a new Dottie’s and Grocery Outlet. Those projects had a building permit valuation total of $12.3 million.

“I think that’s probably the biggest year we’ve had in quite a while,” said Heiser.

Last year also included large municipal projects as well, including two new playground projects and a $1.72 million heavy aircraft apron expansion and concrete hardstand reconstruction funded mostly by

FAA grants (local match was $107,000). The Loon project, housed in the airport industrial complex, also began expanding its footprint in 2019.

Heiser said the 2020 outlook includes more commercial projects including a large hotel and more housing projects than recent years. Heiser said the city and county cost shared agreement, shared planning department and integrated building department, making it easier for housing developments and commercial developments.

In terms of economic growth, Heiser said the new water treatment plant can accommodate two to three times the current usage and that the city is working on building a new well on the east side of town to ensure growth capabilities.

A request for proposals to either renovate Bode Howard Memorial Pool or construct a new aquatic facility is also in the works, with a feasibility study to be completed by the end of this year.

The city is now a certified local government through the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and is participating in the Main Street, U.S.A program through the Governor’s office of economic development. The city is age and dementia friendly and is a part of Tree City USA through the Arbor Day Foundation.

“The city’s employees and public works department and police department and office state, they all have really bought into the proud of it mindset; we don’t have to push them a lot to keep our streets clean, our golf course  is probably the best municipal golf course in state of Nevada, we don’t have to worry about our parks having green grass or being mowed all the time,” said Heiser. “Our employees really just do that themselves and I really think that that’s something the city of Winnemucca is proud of.”

Humboldt County Manager Dave Mendiola said Humboldt County is one large community that consists of Winnemucca, Orovada, Golconda, Denio, Paradise Valley and McDermitt.

Mendiola said the county has focused on economic development with help from Jan Morrison and the Northeastern Economic Development Authority with identifying incentives provided through the Governor's Office of Economic Development as well as joint efforts with the city.

“The city and county both joined together to identify incentives and things that we can do locally to encourage more businesses to come here, and I think we were successful in doing that by changing some of the pieces and parts and variables of that and that seems to be working well,” said Mendiola.

“One of the things that is important to focus on is flexibility so if you as a business coming into our community the fear is always ‘what do we have to go through to get where we want to be’ and our goal is really to make it as easy as possible.”

Focus has also been on affordable housing and workforce job skills training so that the county and its citizens are ready for the anticipated growth and needs of the workforce.

Mendiola said that an updated water plan will be announced in the coming months to ensure citizens and businesses have the quantity and quality of water necessary for future growth.

“Water is critical to any community but especially in the high desert country,” said Mendiola. 

Mendiola said the county has taken over two water systems and wastewater facilities in rural Nevada, a new process for the county. He said they are also preparing to acquire the Star City water system in Grass Valley, along with preparing for environmental growth in that area.

The county has been continuing to develop a human services department that evolved from indigent services to help combat the opioid and mental health issues that are prevalent in the area and nationwide, alongside other local organizations whose efforts are similar.

Mendiola said he has not heard an update on Interstate 11 as to which direction it will travel once it connects to I-80 near Fernley.

“We’re working very hard to make not only the life of our citizens here in Humboldt County better but also for those people who are looking at our county, we’re open for business and we’re willing to talk to anybody about any project and we’re excited to help you in any way that we can to make it a reality.”

Owner of Performance Computing/PC Internet and Humboldt Development Authority Board Member Harold Gudmundsen said Winnemucca is the crossroads of transportation, citing the use of the local rails by Union Pacific, BNSF Railway, several private rail spurs and the California Zephyr Amtrak.

Gudmundsen said the 2012 state rail plan is being updated by the department of transportation that included a recommendation of intermodal connection in Winnemucca to be included in this year’s update, along with the highway traffic along Interstate 80 east and west and highway 95 that goes north.

The Nevada Department of Transportation is in the construction phase of a landscape beautification project in Winnemucca that will improve its four freeway exits and highlight Native American culture, Basque culture, Western Heritage and Buckaroos.

Winnemucca also has an extensive visitor and tourism infrastructure with a 25,000 square foot downtown convention center and the 72 acres that houses the events center with 92,000 square feet of indoor space including three arenas, a race track, livestock holding and stalls.

Gudmundsen also highlighted Humboldt County’s parks, recreation, outdoor gathering spaces, Bloody Shins mountain bike trails and sand dunes, with plans for a restroom and parking facility in the works for the sand dunes.

“What this really means is that for our businesses and our communities that we really have things to offer their employees that make this a great place to live and that enhances the ability of those businesses to really be successful and have that happy stable workforce there.”

Gudmundsen said that broadband infrastructure is integral to economic development and that if you don’t build it they won’t come. He said there is now a robust broadband Internet available in Winnemucca with multiple providers and delivery methods specifically tailored to those needs with redundancy for most emergency services.