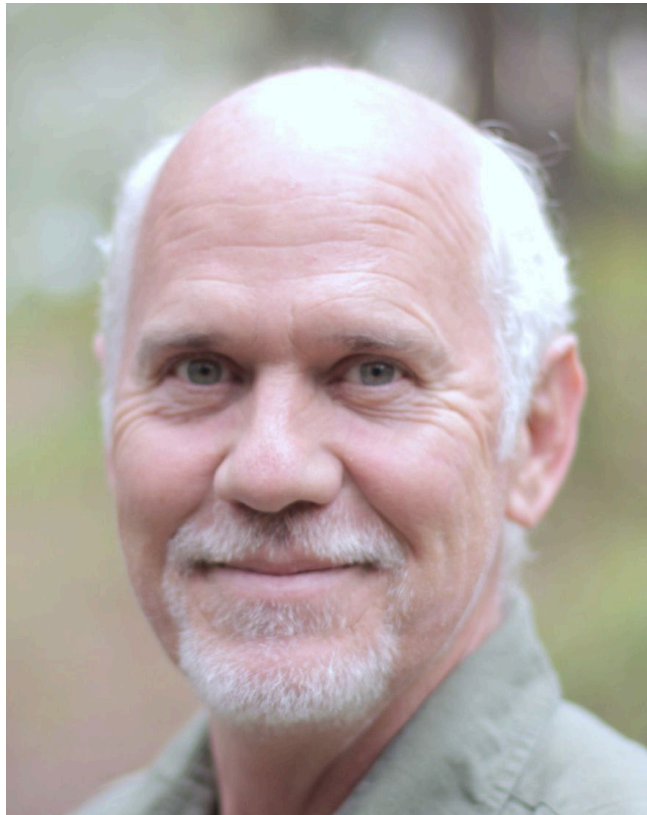

In My View: The Power of Positive Thinking

June 5, 2023



“I believe in the power of positive thinking,” explained the ubiquitous Nick Rail when he was talking about the advancement of the Del Norte Center for the Performing Arts. This also could have been the motto of the Economic Summit I attended on May 19th.

I have been to many economic development meetings in our community where people talked about what could be done to create local jobs and business opportunities. But this gathering presented a level of progress that I had not seen before.

This Economic Summit was sponsored by the Crescent City - Del Norte Chamber of Commerce and was attended by about 200 community leaders. Featured speakers from businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies reported a remarkable number of successes.

Planned Projects

Nick Rail spoke about the momentum that is building toward the construction of a 1000 seat, \$42 million performing arts center. Nick and Lisa Rail provided seed funding that led to Senator McGuire appropriating over \$2 million in matching funding. More than \$4 million of funding has been secured and the design of this project has begun.

Christa Stewart talked about plans for the Elk Valley Rancheria to construct a gas station and convenience store on the road to their casino. This will be open by March 2024. The Rancheria also plans to build a 92-guest room hotel adjacent to the existing casino. Both businesses will create more jobs and provide our youth entry level employment in the hospitality industry.

UC Davis Professor Keith Taylor provided an overview of the process for offshore wind development.

He encouraged us to learn from the experience of other communities that have been through this process.

Michelle Carrillo of Wild Rivers Community Foundation urged local organizations to cooperate in negotiating Community Benefits Agreements. These are agreements through which wind energy developers will provide mitigation funding for community services such as workforce housing, job training, healthcare and childcare.

Funded Projects

Crescent City Manager Eric Weir highlighted projects that the City has completed or that are in process. He reported that Crescent City has secured \$28 million in grants for downtown improvements including the redesign of Front Street and establishment of a regional transit center in partnership with Redwood Coast Transit.

Crescent City is collaborating with Redwood National and State Parks to develop a one-stop “Discovery Center,” where visitors can find information about cultural and recreational opportunities in our community. Crescent City is also implementing a master plan for improvements to Beachfront Park.

Crescent City Harbor Master Tim Petrik presented the Harbor projects that have been funded with over \$10 million in grants awarded. Next month, the Harbor District will kick off a public process to seek input on the redevelopment of the fishing infrastructure at Citizens Dock and the adjacent areas of the harbor.

Job Training

There are always conversations about creating new jobs, but at this Summit there were presentations about training for already existing jobs. Several agencies referred to their efforts to train “homegrown” workers.

Crescent City has had difficulty recruiting police officers to move here to fill vacancies on the police force, so they are recruiting local people who are interested in becoming police officers. Using Measure S tax funding, the City will pay the cost of training new police officers.

After training is completed, the City will hire these workers and forgive 20% of the training cost for each year of service. Through this program, Crescent City has hired one new officer, two are currently in training and two more are set to start training in July. As a result, the City will have a fully staffed police department.

Redwood National and State Parks representative Erin Gates announced that they are starting a Regional Training Center next year that will train heavy equipment operators. The parks will then hire these operators to assist with road removal and restoration projects within the parks.

Career Education

There is an ongoing synergy between the local school district and efforts to train local workers. Del Norte County Superintendent Jeff Harris updated us on efforts by the school district to provide career education to students. There are now 16 career pathways available for high school students through their Career Technical Education program.

One unique career training opportunity is a musical instrument repair class. This program was funded by Nick and Lisa Rail to train students for a career repairing instruments. Students have already found employment in this field.

Shauna Burdick gave a presentation describing the healthcare career pathway developed by the College of the Redwoods. There is a dire need for more healthcare professionals, and difficulty in recruiting workers to move here. This program trains homegrown healthcare workers.

Ms. Burdick described a sequence of healthcare career education that allows advancement in the workforce. Short term classes train people for jobs in phlebotomy and medical billing. In one semester students can train to be an emergency medical technician or medical scribe. They have a one-year program to train to be a paramedic or psych technician. There is a two-year associate degree in nursing and the possibility of transferring to Cal Poly Humboldt for a BS degree in Nursing.

These career pathways will bring workers into healthcare employment where over time they can continue to take classes to move up the career ladder. A nurse attending this Summit described how she had continued to take classes while raising a family, and is now a department head at Sutter Coast Hospital. Sutter will pay the tuition for their employees to encourage ongoing education.

Hopeful Future

Hearing these presentations at the Economic Summit gives me hope that our community will have a prosperous future. The collaboration that is occurring between educators and employers demonstrates an effective model for economic development and employment in our community.

Positive thinking leads to positive results. Let's keep it up!

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