

Sisters seeks economic vitality at summit

By Diane Goble
Correspondent

Many of those who want to be part of shaping the future and strengthening the economy of Sisters were at FivePine Conference Center last Friday as part of the Economic Vitality Summit — Shaping Sisters.

The event was sponsored by the Ford Family Foundation and organized by Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) with assistance from Sisters Economic Development Manager Caprielle Foote-Lewis. RDI is a nonprofit formed by the Oregon legislature to help rural communities across the Pacific Northwest grapple with the economic downturn. They focus on leadership development, building capacity of rural groups, and moving capacity to action.

The agenda of this event was not a visioning process but an opportunity to look at things that are being done successfully in similar communities in similar economic situations and make them applicable to Sisters by tapping into the broad base of knowledgeable, skilled and motivated leaders, a diversity of effective organizations and productive collaborations among organizations available in this town.

After a presentation of ideas related to the changing rural and world economy,

there were several panel discussions with current and former Sisters High School students, nonprofit organizers, and local business leaders and entrepreneurs demonstrating the level and variety of talent available in Sisters Country.

Panelists talked about the current situation and what they think needs to be done to attract more families, improve our schools, create living-wage jobs, provide affordable housing, take care of our seniors, attract new businesses, and energize the economy.

The afternoon session, Taking Action Locally & Building Momentum led by Noelle Colby-Rotell and Alexa Carey from RDI and Foote-Lewis, split the approximately 100 attendees into four groups, each with a facilitator, to generate ideas

about what could be done in certain areas that would lead to a more robust, collaborative, and growing economy in Sisters Country.

The discussions were animated and productive as each group generated a list of action items, which will be compiled and distributed to the email list. Follow-up groups will be organized by the sponsors to facilitate further discussions and grow community engagement in the process.

Foote-Lewis hopes this event will ignite passions, stir imaginations and encourage participants to become part of the solution by continuing the discussion beyond the summit to get the friends, neighbors, and co-workers excited about contributing to Sisters' future economic growth.

Following the conference, participants were invited to

Three Creeks Brewing Co. for hors d'oeuvres and libations, and to continue the conversation. Comments about the presentation were positive, but there's a wait-and-see attitude about what's going to happen next.

Jessica and Douglas Mohr of Mohr Solutions in Sisters appreciated the networking opportunities and being able to put names with faces; he felt this kind of event "evens the playing field and the barriers start to come down." She believes in "pursuing excellence and capitalizing on Sisters' unique heritage."

Jay Wilkins said the conference was a great use of time... "a lot of information all in one place, good conversations, brought the community together."

Several people mentioned there didn't seem to be a

coherent vision for the future of Sisters. Are we a tourist town, a retirement community, a destination resort, a great place to live and raise a family? Are we all of the above? They seemed to feel that until there is a clear vision, all this great conversation will go nowhere because people don't agree on what Sisters is.

Bill Birnbaum thought the conference would continue to stimulate creativity.

"When you get enough smart people in a room," he said, "they are bound to come up with some good ideas." He sees this as an important first step. He and Bob Hoffman agreed that the energy has to be directed. "Come up with a vision and that gives you the direction," Hoffman said.

For more information, contact Caprielle Foote-Lewis at 541-549-6022.

Agenda...

Sisters City Council
City Hall, 520 E. Cascade Avenue

May 14, 6 p.m. workshop
1. Transportation System Plan (TSP)/Transportation Growth Management (TGM) grant.

2. City council candidate discussion.

A. Public hearing — Ordinance No. 458: Amending development code.

B. Ordinance No. 459: Comprehensive plan amendment eliminating references to back-in diagonal parking.

C. Approve FY 2015/16 City of Sisters goals and priorities.

D. Instream lease for the Lazy Z Property — P. Bertagna

E. Contract with Spendthrift Forestry Consulting LLC for City Forester services.

F. Contract with Richards Bartell's Construction for the E. Jefferson and E. Washington parking and pedestrian improvements.

G. Finalize business-owner survey.

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