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Goal to Establish More Green-Jobs Education

By Independent News

A task force created by the Tri-Valley Business Council is gearing up to form a partnership among educators, business people and government officials to expand the options for people who want to enter the growing field of sustainable business.

The task force's goal is to prepare a report by next school year on how Tri-Valley school districts, Las Positas College and Cal State East Bay could start to create and implement new programs designed to focus students in the direction of green jobs. The whole effort will require close communication between educators, business, and government, and funding from private and governmental grants.

Jim Caldwell, executive director of Workforce Incubator, was chair of a one-day conference last week at Las Positas College that provided the kick-off for the effort. About 30 people have signed up to accomplish the committee work. Caldwell told the Independent after the conference that the group's task is a big one. "There are a dozen different functions we need to look at. We'll have to see what skill sets are required, what jobs to target, and we need to inventory current education programs."

The payoff will be big. It can help put the Tri-Valley on the cutting edge of sending its workers into the newly emerging high-tech jobs aimed at cutting carbon emissions, and switching to alternative sources of power. Such jobs as research scientists, engineers and solar panel installers will be part of the new green economy.

As Caldwell described it, there will be a career pathway to the green jobs. The path will start in the high schools, run through the community college districts, and through Cal State Eastbay.

TVBC president Toby Brink echoed Caldwell's statement. He told the Independent, "We need to make sure we have a pipeline of educated workers who understands industry's needs, so they can jump into careers. We don't know what it (future green job market) will look like yet, but we know we can build a basic skills set for those careers."

Brink added, "It's all about staying ahead of the career curve, and being competitive with other regions and other parts of the world."

McNERNEY DELIVERS KEYNOTE TALK

Rep. Jerry McNerney (D-Pleasanton) presented the keynote address that underscored the need for partnerships to improve education.

Citing high rates of failure in some school districts, McNerney said we need to get these kids engaged and a part of this economic system. I know LLNL, Sandia and Oracle want to help. It's up to community leaders to make this happen. That's my focus in the next 10 years or more."

Talking about the high educational levels and world sophistication that other nations are achieving, McNerney said that China is graduating more engineers than the United States. When he visited Amsterdam, Dutch students there were able to converse with him in English about U.S. politics.

"We have a cultural bias toward innovation. We can make it a reality. We can lead the world into sustainability. That's my message," said McNerney.

Jose Millan, a vice chancellor in the state community college office, said that there already are 40 community colleges that offer green courses or environmentally sensitive programs. They include such areas as landscaping, alternative energy, management, construction, and hazardous waste management.

Joel Kinnamon, chancellor of the Chabot-Las Positas Community College District, told the conference that it's important for Tri-Valley governments, educators and businesses to make a commitment themselves to environmental stewardship.

Kinnamon later told the Independent that the community "expects us to make a significant commitment to become carbon-neutral, and

provide solar structures, wind power and alternative fuel for our institutions.”

Kinnamon continued, “Institutions are models of behavior. Furthermore, our initiatives create a demand that will create additional jobs and industries,” said Kinnamon.

Kinnamon noted that many of today’s students “want to make a difference, a better place.” He cited the presidential campaign of Barack Obama as an example of tapping into the interests of young people. “The Obama figured out some way to tap into that fire. If the community could create a way to tap into that fire, and inspire young people to become involved it would make a difference,” said Kinnamon. “We have a responsibility to lead in that.”

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