

Summit: From vision to reality

Written by [Kelley Atherton, The Triplicate](#) March 31, 2009 08:08 am

Annual economic event is Saturday, April 4

Plan for the future, don't just let it happen haphazardly.

That's the focus of the Crescent City/Del Norte County Chamber of Commerce's annual Economic Summit on Saturday.

A couple of years ago, some local leaders created a vision for the community to look like: thriving businesses, lots of jobs and economic development. The chamber and its initiative Action Del Norte have been calling this vision "May Shum Dun," which in Tolowa means "Our Place of Plenty."

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT: Sixth annual Crescent City/Del Norte County Chamber of Commerce Economic Summit**

- **WHEN: Saturday, registration starts at 8:30 a.m., summit runs from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and lunch will be served; \$10 to register in advance and \$15 at the door**

- **WHERE: Elk Valley Rancheria, 2332 Howland Hill Road**

The next step is to figure out how to make that vision a reality.

"Here's the vision," said Jay Freeman, a Chamber board member and chairman of the Economic Summit Planning Committee, "here's what we're doing to work toward that. Here's how we want it to look, here's some data so we can all work toward that vision."

"If you don't plan, change just happens on its own — we're trying to shape it for tomorrow."

Planning using data

One way to plan for the future is knowing where people will be living in Del Norte County, where they'll be starting or expanding businesses, going to work and doing recreational activities.

Tamera Buchanan, executive director of the Del Norte Local Transportation Commission, along with the Sonoran Institute and Planwest Partners, Inc., has been developing a blueprint plan of the county using GIS (geographic information system) data.

At the economic summit, she will be talking about how this informational tool can help the community plan for tomorrow.

Blueprint planning, Buchanan explained, can illustrate where growth will occur in Del Norte County.

“We will be talking about a reasonable projection — based on GIS data — about how our community will grow and where growth will occur in the next 20 years,” she said.

After the community knows and understands these facts, local agencies can figure out what infrastructure is needed to support future growth.

For example, data shows that Hiouchi is a place of growth. The community has expressed a desire to “calm” the traffic that flies down U.S. Hwy. 199, Buchanan said. This could be done by recoloring the walk and bike path lines or by putting in sidewalks — these things indicate to a driver to slow down.

“It makes sense that we address the traffic calming issue so that community can continue to grow,” she said.

The community has already been working towards the future — May Shum Dun — but how does the community know it’s going in the right direction?

“Blueprinting will tell us if we’re going in right direction,” Buchanan said. “If we’re ready for growth we’re going to have to accurately project that growth.”

Growth and development can be done without disturbing the local beauty and natural resources, she said.

Del Norte is a “gateway community” in many ways, she explained. It’s a gateway from Oregon into California and it’s a gateway into the Redwood National and State Parks. Buchanan said that the Sonoran Institute is involved with the local blueprint planning effort by helping the community “have a conversation” about how to balance nature and commerce.

What the stats say

In order to move the community forward in the right direction, locals will have the chance to better understand the economy and where there’s room for financial growth.

Dennis Mullins, a labor market specialist for the state Employment Development Department, gave a presentation at the 2008 summit and will give an update on local statistics and demographics.

Last year, Mullins gave the basic statistics about Del Norte County.

This year, Freeman said Mullins will go into some different areas and break down the real estate market, tourism industry, other industries and jobs that have growth potential and how Del Norte competes with neighboring counties.

Providing health insurance

A good portion of the summit will focus on data and how to plan for growth, but another part of the Chamber of Commerce mission is to provide support for local businesses.

At the summit, representatives from the Access Project at Brandeis University and Gary Blatnick, the director of the county Department of Health and Human Services, will present the results of a survey on small businesses and health insurance done last fall.

The point of the survey was to figure out how many small businesses in Del Norte offer health insurance to their employees, and why they do or don't.

Financially, it can be difficult for small businesses to be able to provide health insurance coverage for employees. This can hinder businesses' ability to grow and expand, but many in Del Norte are living without health insurance.

By knowing the struggles these entrepreneurs go through, the chamber and county health department can find ways to help businesses provide coverage, said Gina Zottola, executive director of the chamber.

"It's really hard for small businesses to supply health care insurance for employees," Zottola said. "We'll be discussing those things and actions that can be taken."

Showing up for the conversation

All of this information and conversation simulators can be helpful in shaping the future of Del Norte, Freeman said, but it takes people to show up and be willing to learn and talk about these issues.

On the flyers going around about the economic summit, there's a quote from the authors of "Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities" and members of the Conservation Fund and the Sonoran Institute, which is involved with blueprint planning. The quote states:

"Change is inevitable, but it does not have to come at the expense of what citizens and communities value. We can either be victims of change or we can plan for it, shape it, and emerge stronger from it."

Freeman said that this basically means Del Norters have to plan for the future and be involved — this is part of the chamber's purpose for having an economic summit each year.

"You need to be there in order for the community to come together," Freeman said. "You have to be there to be a voice and be a participant concerned about future."

Zottola wanted to make sure everyone could attend the economic summit and be a participant. The registration price was lowered from \$20 to \$10.

"One thing I wanted to do was make it affordable," she said, because this information is specifically focused on Del Norte County and its residents. "These are tough times for our community. Everyone should be able to attend."

To register visit the chamber's Web site at www.delnorte.org or call 464-3174.