

Cohesive economic development strategy requires new branding

By Joseph W. Brady

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Over the past 30 or more years there have been several efforts made to organize a coordinated economic development strategy for the cities of Adelanto, Apple Valley, Barstow, Hesperia and Victorville. The most recent iteration of such efforts is Opportunity High Desert and the similarly named High Desert Opportunity, which seek to engage the five communities in joint marketing efforts, including collaborative attendance at regional and national retail conferences and sponsorship of an annual economic development conference. Prior to these entities, various efforts at joint collaboration in regional economic development date back many years

For as long as most of us can remember, our region has been referred to as the High Desert and, in some circles, the Victor Valley. Neither of these two names accurately reflects the lands encompassed by the cities of Adelanto, Apple Valley, Barstow, Hesperia and Victorville and their surrounding areas, which comprise the main incorporated communities of our region. The High Desert technically encompasses the Palmdale/Lancaster corridor as well as the communities of Yucca Valley, Joshua Tree and Twentynine Palms, while the Victor Valley technically excludes Barstow and its surrounding areas.

The most prominent geographic feature that links our five incorporated cities is the Mojave River, one of only two rivers in the United States that actually runs from south-to-north. The Mojave is also somewhat unique in that it runs primarily underground. Referring to our region as the Mojave River Basin or the Mojave River Valley would impart a name that more closely represents the geographic setting of our five communities, thereby giving the area a more identifiable image around which to structure a regional marketing effort. As some might recall, the Mojave name has been used for previous economic development efforts, including the Mojave River Regional Board of Trade and the Mojave Regional Economic Development Council, two organizations that thrived in previous years but have since gone by the wayside. As the leaders of these prior efforts have passed on or moved out of the area it is imperative that a new generation of individuals step forward to assume these vital roles.

With the national and regional economic cycle approaching the latter stages of a growth period this is an appropriate time for leaders of the Mojave River Basin to consider joining back together, perhaps under the leadership of our two community colleges, to create an economic development organization that will encompass education, leadership development, job training, marketing and, ultimately, job creation. We must do a more effective job of articulating the identity of our region in the minds of prospective employers. We also need to do a better job of preparing our young people for the jobs that currently exist in our region while seeking to broaden the range of employment opportunities.

Finally, and most importantly, we must do a better job of preparing our youth to assume leadership roles within our communities.



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With all these things in mind I am calling for a dialogue among the leaders of the business, governmental and nonprofit sectors in the Mojave River Valley's five incorporated cities that will lead to the development of a comprehensive and sustained regional economic development strategy.

As someone that has been involved with many economic development organizations, in attempts to collectively market the High Desert region between the public sector and the private sector, we shouldn't wait until our economy falls back into recession to initiate this effort. This a topic that benefits the entire High Desert (Mojave River Valley Region).

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