

Precinct Reporter

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Three Symposium in High Desert

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The High Desert residents were treated to an issues symposium over the weekend presented by Gi & Associates and Millionaire Mind Kids. Nancy Jackson, Southern California Edison, hosted the event at their local facility. The three E's are Education, Employment, and Economics as they relate to high desert residents, especially African Americans.

Nancy Jackson welcomes the attendees to her house; she then introduced Regina Weatherspoon-Bell and Delores Williams, co-hosts of the symposium. Bell, a business owner, related the dire need for qualified employees in the high desert and thanked Delores Williams for being a front-line soldier for our children.

The demographics for African Americans in the Victor Valley are listed at 9.7%; Hispanics are at 58.6%, and whites at 59.7%; these are all local figures taken in the midst of the housing bubble burst. The prevailing ages are 19-24 year-olds comprising 25.0%; and 35-54 year-olds slightly ahead at 25.1%.

All three of the E's Education, Economics, and Unemployment are impacting the area, known for its reasonable housing.

One of the panelists shedding light on the situations that we are faced with was Derek King, on education. He is community outreach coordinator at Excelsior Charter School in Victorville; and an appointed Victor Valley Union High School Board of Trustees. King believes that all students can learn and is a strong advocate for student safety. He stated all stakeholders in the process should be involved; In the High Desert 52% of the population has never attended college. The purpose of education is to take us from the classroom to career choices, yet 50% of the students making the leap to college have remediate then they get there. The K-12 learning experience did not prepare them for college level work. The drop-out rates for African American males is 43% in high schools. These are some of the issues the local economy is facing.

The moderator for the symposium was Dr. Ron Williams who recently left the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools staff and now serves as the Assistant of Educational Services for the Victor Valley Union High School District. He is also president of the Association of California School Administrators for Region 12.

King, during his fifteen minute presentation on what he believes has to happen to change the direction of public schools, stated that local businesses should use students as interns so they can begin to get a feeling of reality. Education is now what “academic inflation,” meaning that the jobs that were available ten years ago with an associate degree now require a bachelor’s degree, and the escalation continues up scale. He concluded by asking stakeholders present to contact him and tell him what experience they have in whatever their area of expertise is to help prepare young people for success.

The second panelist was Joseph Brady, president of the Bradco Companies and publisher of the Bradco Report, informing businesses, educators, and others what is happening in the high desert, what is on the horizon, and what changes would be predicated upon those economic curves. Brady is an appointed member of the Board of Trustees at Victor Valley Community College. He stated that since we are in a global recession, the rate of growth for the United States will continue to be around 2% for the next several years. The inland Empire is still down about 14,000 jobs, and the high desert region of the Inland Empire is still hurting. He sees the next 5-7 years as the area continuing to simmer. He warned the attendees not be mesmerized by numbers. Brady’s topic was economics.

Rounding out the panelists was Robert Lovingood, who operates a local employment staffing business. He is responsible for placing many residents of the High Desert in temporary and permanent positions. He candidly stated that today the 20-30 year olds cannot pass basic math and English tests. He said “As my education grew, my job opportunities grew.” Lovingood stated what many of us already know: if children, especially boys, are not reading by third grade, those statistics are used to project how many prisons should be built to house them. If they are non-readers, there are no job opportunities for them except illegal activities that will land them in those prisons. Another fact most of us already know is that the schools are not educating our children. Changes must be made.

All three panelists were in agreement that all of the E’s are linked. If the education foundation crumbles, the employment sector will collapse, and the local economy that was supported by that sector will also start to require life support.

Businesses are not coming to the high desert en masse because there is no educated work force. However, there are at least five or six super Wal-Marts slated for the area in the next several years; two of them have already opened. When the panelists concluded, the attendees had plenty of questions prepared for them, questions such as: Why do we have so few African Americans and Latino workers on Caltrans and other public sector jobs? Answer: education!

All three panelists are candidates for office, and the audience had the opportunity to listen to their responses and deconstruct their fifteen-minute introductions on the topic they were chosen to elaborate on.

In the second half of the symposium, the MillionAire Mind Kids and First District Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt's office presented certificates to their partners, volunteers and sponsors who were the life lines for the summer camps they provided.