

January 16, 2006

Message From the Chair—Ken Newby

My office overlooks Fig Garden Village, where I have been observing a beehive of construction. It's an interesting process; requiring diverse skill-sets applied in coordination with many others. First, a plan is developed unseen by the casual observer; then dirt gets moved in a quasi-chaotic fashion yielding a crude outline of what's to come; followed by the satisfyingly-swift erection of the core structures, which look impressive yet remain mere shells; finally concluded by the frustratingly-long finishing process necessary to achieve the vision of the plan.

I believe the construction process is a useful analogy to the transformation underway in our community. Thoughtful plans have been developed for such fundamentals as job creation, economic vitality, enhancement of core educational systems, and air quality. Talented people representing many skill-sets and institutions are intensely engaged in implementing the plans; regional and valley-wide alliances have been formed; and we are starting to act as one, perhaps as never before.

So, you ask, if our transformation was a construction project, what would be its phase of completion? My sense is that on balance we're nearing completion of the core structures; meaning that we have come a great distance but hard slogging awaits us in the finishing process. I am convinced, though, that all aspects are in place for us to attain our vision of a built-to-last transformation of our community and region. Our Business Council can be proud of the roles it has played in these efforts; and you can be assured that it is determined to see things through. I salute those who have taken us this far and welcome those who will help us finish.

Seed Thoughts & Blueprints for Transformation—The Plan

Picking up on Ken's thoughts it is helpful to remember where we started. Many people were deeply concerned about the deteriorating economic and social indicators in our community. In 1993, a handful of business leaders stepped up to do something about them. It became clear that individual projects would be inadequate to solve the problems—they were systemic. Competing on low cost in global economy was not sustainable and had many negative side effects. Instead, we had to find a way to build upon our many assets to compete on value. In 2000, the firm Collaborative Economics crafted a strategy called *The Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley: Growing a Prosperous Economy That Benefits People and Place*. The FBC recruited a dozen people to explore the ideas and figure out how to implement them. This team created the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative (CRI) and with loaned resources from the FBC & Fresno State launched 5 major initiatives. (Go to www.fresnocri.org to learn more and read the report.)

Regional Jobs Initiative/Fresno Unified—Core Structures

While the CRI is still humming in the background, two far more visible “core structures” have been built. The Regional Jobs Initiative and the work with Fresno Unified are comprehensive efforts to fundamentally change how we function in order to achieve better results. As Ken noted, the core structures are nearing completion. However, it is the finishing process--“the commitment to outcomes”-- that is the final test. If you want to “pick up an oar” go to www.fresnorji.org or Fresno Unified's website <http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us>. The Choosing Our Future report is one of the quick links. These are just two of the many efforts going on in our community. Find the nexus between your highest skills and greatest passion and make a difference.

The Magnet, The Inspiration & The Glue

Central to all the work is a list of ten community values—stewardship, boundary crossing & collaboration, commitment to outcomes, art of the possible thinking, fact-based decision making, truth telling, power parity, commitment to resolving conflict, asset-based approach and disclosure of conflicts of interest. To explain how people from diverse perspectives have come together to address chronic and challenging problems, start with the values. They are in full form on our website.