

May 12, 2008

Message From the Chair Emeritus—Richard Johanson

One of my long anticipated joys upon the arrival of springtime has been making a pilgrimage to the Giant Sequoias in Kings Canyon National Park. To stroll, pause, and meditate among these nearly two thousand year old Redwoods is to fully appreciate our brief space in time. As one gazes skyward at their outstretched branches, they appear to be thanking us for our ongoing efforts to elevate our own personal and community values. As we continue on our journey to create a better world for all among us, we need only heed the message being sent to us by these ancient sentinels—“our task is not to reach a destination but to create a better pathway for those who will follow us”. I urge you to take a trip up into the nearby Sierras and have your own private chat with these inspiring natural treasures.

Fresno County Employment Study Sends Important Investment Message

The Workforce Investment Board (WIB) just released its second Fresno County Employment Study as a tool to guide their efforts and those of their partner organizations. The report is in essence a gap analysis—the numbers of jobs available without a qualified worker to fill it. For years, our community was using an outmoded, attraction strategy and fragmented, competitive training apparatus to address our most critical issue—quality employment. As noted by **Blake Konczal**, director of WIB, ““Shifting the majority of economic development resources toward the development of human capital in Fresno would be the clearest and most economical way to help existing local businesses to both stay and grow in Fresno.” The shift from an old way of thinking to a new approach will require significant changes in how many organizations do business. Or as **Peter Senge** has stated, “...collaboration is vital to sustain what we call profound or really deep change, because without it, organizations are just overwhelmed by the forces of the status quo.” The report is available online at www.workforce-connection.com.

“Start It Up” Fresno’s Entrepreneur Challenge (Played to the sounds of the Rolling Stones)

As a tactic to attract talent, great ideas and serious capital, the Lyles Center and the RJI are holding Fresno’s first national business plan competition. An exclusive reception to kick off the “business Olympics” is coming up next week. The prize is \$100,000 in start up capital and \$150,000 of in kind support including marketing and legal and office assistance. If you would like more information, contact the Lyles Center at 559.294.2045.

Civic Entrepreneurs—Realistic, Results Driven, Collaborative, Long –Term Thinkers

A few years ago, **Tom Jones** offered a civic entrepreneur class at Fresno State and there were no takers. This time, the class quickly filled to 40. **Lee Ayres** has taught social entrepreneurship for the past few semesters. This class is also full. This bodes well for our region. Those with an entrepreneurial spirit don’t think someone else “oughta do something”, they do it. **Doug Henton** a long time coach and author of two books about civic entrepreneurs, *Grassroots Leaders for a New Economy: How Civic Entrepreneurs Are Building Prosperous Communities* and *Civic Revolutionaries: Igniting the Passion for Change in America’s Communities*, says “Civic entrepreneurs help communities collaborate to develop and organize their economic assets and to build productive, resilient relationships across the public, private, and civil sectors. They forge the ties that bind economy and community for their mutual benefit. They provide continuity to work on tough issues over the long haul. The term civic entrepreneur combines two important American traditions: entrepreneurship--the spirit of enterprise--and civic virtue--the spirit of community.” In short, they are stewards with passion and acumen. In Fresno, there is a growing network of civic entrepreneurs working together across three spheres of work—the economy, infrastructure development (natural and built environment) and human development. There is a place for everyone to make a difference.