

Green Job Incubator Plans Advancing

By Ron McNicoll

With its well-regarded educational institutions, research labs, and partnership-welcoming businesses, the Tri-Valley is in a good position to make a strong contribution to the growing worldwide green economy, according to a new report.

The Workforce Incubator (WI) kicked off a drive in August 2008 at a forum at Las Positas College to determine how to put the area in the best possible position for the job expansion in the green economy. The forum was co-sponsored by the Tri-Valley Business Council (TVBC), which is promoting green economy jobs creation. Workshop Incubator is an independent non-profit business. Its executive director, James Caldwell serves on the board of TVBC.

There will be an estimated \$1.3 trillion worldwide in the green economy by 2017, WI executive director Jim Caldwell told The Independent. At the kick-off event last year, Caldwell said that he would deliver a report in a year's time about how the Tri-Valley can build the infrastructure for green jobs. Caldwell made good on the promise, with a report released last month that shows the statistical underpinnings of the area's current situation, and how it can improve to meet the expected demands in the green economy.

The report was featured in Caldwell's presentation to the state Commission for Economic Development and its chairman, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, at a meeting in Livermore in August. The state is an important player in advocating for federal stimulus money to go to California projects. Caldwell said that the Tri-Valley wants to share in the millions of dollars that may be funneled through state government to local areas.

The strengths of the Tri-Valley in preparing green economy workers include two of the top 10 unified school districts in the state (Pleasanton and San Ramon Valley), Cal State East Bay, Las Positas College in Livermore, and Diablo Valley College in San Ramon. There already has been movement to create career academies local public school districts. Sarah Palmer, a regional occupational program science teacher, is teaching a two-course sequence in alternative energy at Granada High School in Livermore. There is also a vision to create a Science and Engineering Learning Center. Federal stimulus money is being sought for it. However, other funding sources are also being explored.

STIMULUS MONEY POTENTIAL

Additional funds being sought from stimulus money are for a clean energy workforce training program, which is a state mission. There is also a vision of obtaining stimulus money for an energy partners program. It would focus on the professional workforce of scientists, engineers and technicians. Caldwell is part of the statewide team that is working on that focus.

There are other partnerships possible, too. The total grant money that could be available to California for all of the programs would be approximately \$19 million. Hopefully, some of that would filter down to the Tri-Valley, said Caldwell.

The report notes that the science labs in the Tri-Valley are a good intellectual source for new inventions that can improve science for the green economy. The labs have made spinning off scientific applications into businesses and patents something of a small industry itself, and continue on that path.

MATCHING EDUCATION TO JOBS

Many area businesses are interested in creating green jobs or already offer them. The report says there are 10 companies in the Tri-Valley with 382 employees that form a green economy base. Caldwell pointed out that those jobs represent a variety of job descriptions, not just

technicians who install solar panels or undertake similar work. Many are college-educated engineers or other scientists or consultants who have a role in planning or designing green facilities or operations. Analyzing what is needed in matching education to jobs, the report shows that 62 percent of green job titles listed statewide require a bachelor's degree or higher. Some 9 percent of the job descriptions require a two-year degree. Eleven percent are for people from trade schools. The remaining 18 percent require a high school diploma or its equivalent. Caldwell said that the Tri-Valley statistics are similar to those statewide. He emphasized that these qualifications apply to green job titles. They are not the percentages of the green jobs themselves. So, 62 percent of the listed job descriptions in the state require four years or more of college. However, that doesn't mean that 62 percent of jobs require those degrees. One job description can include many thousands of opportunities for high school graduates. Another description might offer only hundreds of jobs for those with a four-year degree. Caldwell said that one new development that occurred since he began his research was the drastically slower economy. Now it's even more important than ever for people such as laid-off construction workers to go to a community college, and earn a two-year degree. That could qualify them for green jobs that will come up sooner than any improvement in the construction economy might occur, he said.

NEXT: GET PARTNERSHIPS MOVING

Now that the study has been completed, with its assessment of the current situation, and an outline of the path that can be taken, the schools and businesses can begin to work toward those goals starting this fall, said Caldwell.

As to the career pathways from K-12 up through college, Caldwell said that he discovered in his research, "What we have are fragments, not pathways yet. We'll bring about the pathways, working with school leaders. There have been major distractions, because of the state budget (and its lack of school funding). That has slowed progress in this area. We have to work with schools and colleges and industry partners to get those pathways built," said Caldwell. Caldwell will be welcoming businesses to join the effort. So far, PG&E has stepped up as a business partner, as has Sustainable Spaces, which provides services support for green construction. Other participants are StopWaste.org (Alameda County's solid waste recycling agency) and the carpenter's union.