

Learning about sustainable development issues in rural Utah

On the 19th of April 2019, the Utah International Mountain Forum, in conjunction with Utah Valley University held a roundtable titled; Sustainable Development in Rural Utah. This event was organized by the VP of UIMF, Lacey Meyer. Invited to the round-table were several of Utah's most influential individuals in rural development. The event fostered greater understanding of the issues facing rural communities in Utah, and how their sustainable development and business friendly ways can help them to diversify and grow.



The first speaker was Mrs. Geri Gambler, the executive director of SEUALG and SUEDD. These two organizations have been focusing on reducing poverty in rural Utah. They do this through a variety of means. The first is supporting the working families in rural areas. They also invest in young children, helping to create programs and improving education. They additionally bring in outside programs for help. Hard work and a living wage is also important for these

communities, as is their community pride and international friendships. She also spoke on the Circles program that they have established to help end the poverty cycle.



The second speaker was Mayor Michael Kourianos, the mayor of Price. This small town is situated very near to Orem, where the roundtable was being held, but is a rural community. He spoke about the history of the town, and that many of his constituents would claim that their greatest export was their young people. Many of the youth have left Price, seeing no real opportunity in the area, and then do not return. He also spoke of his concern for the future of the community, as most of their people are employed at a coal-fired powerplant nearby. One day it will close, and he spoke about how they needed to diversify now.

The third speaker was Nicholina Womack, the CEO of FutureINDesign, a business that specializes in career development for marginalized young adults and adult learners in Utah. Their primary goal is to provide access to important technology to end the cycle of poverty. She spoke on bringing business to rural Utah. She spoke a lot on many businesses needing soft skills, and that many of the young people in rural Utah have a lot of soft skills, and their situation forces them to

come up with creative solutions in order to survive. Many of them would be excellent workers in the “techforce.” Access to technology is creating a major gap between the haves and the have nots in Utah, and she hopes to change that.



The final speaker was Tony Martines, the Commissioner of Carbon County. He also spoke of the special challenges that face rural Utah as powerplants and mines continue to close that are the lifeblood of rural Utah. He spoke also of the dwindling population and many stores and buildings were closing as they were no longer viable. While things have improved with natural gas and oil shale work, at some point will run out and they will be left to still pay the bills. However, he is optimistic because they have excellent infrastructure with four rail hubs, one of the longest runways in the state, excellent highways, and Utah State University Eastern. He also is excited about the prospect of incoming companies that want to move in, and also the myriad of home-grown businesses that have started.

The final part of the meeting was the actual round-table where all participants sat as a panel in the front of the room. Many of the students were able to ask question of the panelists, and their

answers were succinct and informative. Many of the questions focused on topics that had been addressed during the speaking. One of the major issues that came up again was trying to bring back many of the young people back to these rural counties and communities. This is truly one of the few ways to maintain a sustainable system in these communities.

We are very thankful for all the guests who took time out of their busy schedules to address the students and inform us of the issues that face rural Utah and how we can implement sustainable development in our own state.

Brandon Pedler, President, German Club at UVU