

Boost Inland's 'green' image

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By Ali Sahabi

The strength of the Inland Empire has emerged and so has its vision. We are an economic powerhouse, boasting a \$77 billion economy that rivals many states in the nation. And, with 2 million new residents projected to move here in the next 15 years, we are growing at an unprecedented rate. With so much ahead, we must develop a vision for bringing high-paying jobs closer to home and building a sustainable quality of life.

We already have. More than 400 key leaders and community representatives have been working since June on a regional effort called the Green Valley Initiative. It's a dual-county economic development plan designed to establish our region as a hub for green technologies, renewable energy, alternative fuels and building materials – an effort that will bring new jobs, transportation solutions and a new attitude.

In just a few months, the Green Valley Initiative has already accomplished a tremendous amount, including:

- Unveiling a roadmap in October, reflecting the work and insight of literally dozens of stakeholders, from mayors of cities to county supervisors, environmental groups, financial and economic development experts, representatives of the region's cultural and educational institutions, community members and leaders from our local Native American tribes.
- Attracting the attention of more than a dozen green-tech companies interested in relocating to our region.
- Working with California to designate our region for a recycling education pilot program.
- Cataloging our region's "green" assets to identify existing resources and opportunities for expansion.
- Bringing together our colleges and universities to share resources and ideas to create a "green" brain trust.
- Signing on municipal, county and tribal governments as "green valley jurisdictions" committed to incorporating sustainable land use and green building, business and purchasing programs.
- Garnering resolutions of support from both counties supporting the Green Valley Initiative.
- Identifying funding and capital sources.

- Establishing working stakeholder groups, each of which focuses on developing and implementing strategic plans in the areas of education, policy and economic development.

For years, our region has cultivated efforts to establish green neighborhoods, green businesses and sustainable lifestyles within its boundaries. The Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Plan, San Bernardino's Green County initiatives, cities that have adopted the Building Industry Association's California Green Builder program and the hundreds of green-friendly businesses already here all serve as proof that we are on our way to defining a new vision for the region.

But even with everything that has been accomplished, there is still more to do. From rebranding our region to attracting green-tech employers to coordinating policy and educational sustainability initiatives, our list of challenges and opportunities is lengthy. We encourage everyone to get involved, from city council members to school board members.

We have the economic strength, infrastructure, consumer demand and educational capacity to support this vision. With a broad consensus and a regional focus, we will make it happen. For a list of existing resources, or for details about the initiative itself, visit www.GreenValleyNow.org

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