

KEEP ON TRUCKIN'
"Nevada County Business News"
July/August 2005
Larry Burkhardt

A few thoughts as I prepare to leave Nevada County... No doubt I appeared out of place on my first day at the ERC office, wearing a dark blue, double-breasted suit. There I found a card table, a folding metal chair and a telephone in an otherwise empty office. To make matters worse, the card table and chair were borrowed from a company across the hall. Those first days were full of promise and anticipation, as the community looked to grow and sustain its first formal economic development program.

Over the years, ERC has developed into a professional, credible organization with a mission to support the process of local job creation. ERC's efforts have yielded significant positive economic results for the community, as detailed in two separate studies conducted by Chico State University. These studies have documented dramatic returns on the investment of the public and private sector organizations that support ERC's work.

Our primary focus has been on providing support to our existing product export employers. Sometimes this has meant assisting in one way or another with a corporate expansion. In other cases, our involvement might take the form of a phone call to city hall to clarify the status of a building permit, or locating a piece of needed equipment.

We've had the good fortune to support the relocation of several employers into our community. These new jobs bring diversity to our economic base, and serve to offset some of the jobs that are typically lost in any community due to attrition.

Overall, this community enjoys a relatively healthy economy today. Sales tax revenues are increasing, many companies have expanded their employment base, and the reputations of many local employers have gained international standing.

If my departure allows me the luxury of engaging in commentary, please allow me to offer a caution. Nevada County has withstood historic downturns in the past, including those associated with the Great Depression. It will not withstand complacency regarding our economic future. Nevada County is not an island, separate from the influences and forces of change that affect change. We, right here, are increasingly engaged in a global economy—one that rewards competition, and ruthlessly slashes and tramples those unable or unwilling to adapt. We will not survive without the ability to attract and retain young people to our community—allowing them to put a stake in the ground and stand shoulder to shoulder with us.

While it represents only one tool available to support the growth of a healthy local economy, ERC must secure a higher level of community support--from the private sector and from the public sector in order to truly be effective. We are extremely fortunate to have world-class companies and world-class talent in our rather obscure and remote community. Time will tell whether Nevada County will withstand the challenges posed by the realities of international competition, and retain its economic viability. A strong ERC will be a great help in the process.