

WANTED: COMMUNITY VISION. EXCELLENT BENEFITS.

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Nevada County residents are fortunate to have approximately 90,000 experts on almost any subject we might care to discuss. It's not that we're particularly different—communities just find it rather difficult to achieve anything approaching consensus; and those expecting to find widespread agreement on any issue of substance in Nevada County might be legitimately considered something just shy of foolish.

Even so, we should agree that we have some trends developing in our community that if left unattended will become increasingly troublesome. Take for example the much-discussed issue of housing. Since 1997, the average cost of a single-family home in western Nevada County has increased by more than 98 percent. During the same time, the average local wage has increased only 22 percent. It now requires an annual salary in excess of \$74,000 to qualify for a mortgage on our average home. It seems fairly obvious that regardless of the reasons, every year more and more workers are finding themselves priced out of Nevada County's housing market.

Given that fact alone, perhaps it's not particularly coincidental that the average age of Nevada County's population is 43. Compare that with the state-wide average age of 33, and you have some indication of Nevada County's creeping evolution into a retirement community.

Now, I have nothing against retirees—some of my best friends are retirees, and in fact I hope some day to be one of them. But I don't remember this community making a conscious choice to be primarily a retirement community. In fact, one of the principle reasons that the ERC was founded was to support efforts that would provide opportunity for our young people—an increasing number of whom appear to have no other choice but to start their career almost anywhere but Nevada County.

In the absence of a clearly articulated community vision, allow me to state some assumptions. First, I assume that the majority of Nevada County residents want our community to be both viable and dynamic. Second, I assume that without the on-going contributions of workers living here, we will have great difficulty in maintaining viability. Lastly, I assume that without the vitality, energy and passion of young people, we will stagnate as a community. All of which is to say that I assume that we wish Nevada County to be a community that strives to achieve balance and to extend access to opportunity, regardless of age, personal wealth or ethnic background.

It would seem to follow that we need to clearly articulate a community vision of balance and opportunity. Once accepted, that vision will lead to some very logical goals and actions that this community must pursue to assure that we're moving in our chosen direction. Without such vision and clearly stated goals, we will continue to inch ever closer toward becoming a community that none of us would have deliberately chosen for us to become.

I'd be interested in your comments. E-mail me at [ncerc@nccn.net](mailto:ncerc@nccn.net).