



October 24, 2009

## EDAWN nets new business leads at recent conferences

*By Susan Voyles  
svoyles@rgj.com*

While the payoff might take a while, local economic development executive Chuck Alvey can count on his fingers and toes the number of hot leads and new business relationships resulting from two major business conferences in Reno in early October.

Alvey, Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada president, said six hot leads and 13 "warm" leads for locating business headquarters or financial divisions came out of the Geothermal Resources Council's annual meeting.

And at the International Economic Development Council, Alvey said he met with 15 business site consultants, who advise major corporations on where to locate new plants, offices or other operations.

While no immediate leads resulted, having the consultants becoming familiar with the region is key to getting on their lists of recommended sites, Alvey said.

"It would cost a fortune, if you could do it, to get that many to come to town at one time," he said.

EDAWN and the city of Reno sponsored a suite at the Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, the conference headquarters, to woo geothermal companies, and about 40 company officials dropped by, Alvey said.

The hot leads, he said, are companies that have a distinct interest in moving operations here. Those labeled as warm are interested but have other priorities at the moment.

Backers of Tessler, a multi-block project including offices planned in north downtown, are specifically wooing geothermal headquarters. And the Reno City Council has made locating geothermal headquarters downtown a top priority.

About 64 companies have geothermal projects in the state, mostly in Northern Nevada. The Desert Research Institute and the University of Nevada, Reno, also are considered as pluses.

In an energy and water bill approved by the Senate last week and pushed by U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, \$19 million for alternative energy projects is earmarked for Nevada. About \$1 million is included for the Desert Research Institute's geothermal center to train geothermal geoscientists, plant operators and engineers.

About 30 business site consultants came to Reno for the economic development conference. Most of the 1,200 attendees were economic development officials like Alvey, who came from all over the country.

The biggest news, Alvey said, is business is picking up for these consultants after being dead for the first half of the year.

In selling Northern Nevada to the business scouts, Alvey touts the area's proximity to California, high unemployment rate, favorable tax climate and recently reduced land prices and leasing rates.

Its biggest drawback: a perceived lack of skilled workers. "But we're trying to get the message out there are underemployed people here who have the skills."

Alvey gave several examples of companies that have located here as a result of building relationships with site consultants or real estate executives of major corporations: The giant Wal-Mart distribution center in Storey County, Eaglemark Financial Services, the financial services division of Harley Davidson moving into a new building in Carson City rather than moving to Plano, Tex., and the Starbucks roasting plant in Douglas County.

---