

SLO County gets on same eco-devo page

BY STEPHEN NELLIS
Staff Writer

More than 100 business leaders and the county of San Luis Obispo have produced what's being called a first-ever economic strategy for creating more private-sector jobs on the Central Coast.

The 45-page game plan was produced by the Economic Vitality Corp. of San Luis

Obispo and funded with \$50,000 from the county and more than \$75,500 from the private sector. The strategy lays out five fast-growing economic clusters that account for more than 40,000 jobs in the county.

The document is more than a vaguely worded vision. Business leaders from each cluster came up with three to five steps they believe will spur growth in the immediate future, and now that the report

is out, meetings are under way to get the ball rolling on those steps.

The report is available at the EVC's website, www.sloevc.org.

EVC President Mike Manchak said the report's biggest achievement was bringing together more than 100 business leaders from different sectors to work with county Supervisors Adam Hill and Frank Mecham. Many of the businesses have

customers outside of the county, or even the state or country.

"You bring people together who otherwise don't think they have a stake in the economy, and they realize that they do," Manchak said. "They have people here. They invest here. It's a virtuous cycle of prosperity."

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Lacayo Center gives Edison a look at future

When Southern California Edison President John Fielder addressed a few hundred Ventura County business leaders on Nov. 15, he was quick to point out why his company was investing \$300,000 in a new program at CSU Channel Islands.



HENRY DUBROFF
Editor

The Henry L. "Hank" Lacayo Center for Workplace & Community Studies will foster entrepreneurship to drive future economic growth and train California State University students for new jobs, including jobs in green energy and clean technology.

"We're hiring 1,500 people a year," Fielder said, adding that he wanted to see CSU graduates "at the top of the list."

In addition to a three-year commitment from Edison, the Lacayo Center will also benefit from grants from Verizon, AT&T, Southern California Gas Co. and others. Rudy Estrada, who is currently running the CSUCI Small Business Institute, will add the Lacayo Institute to his

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Camarillo Premium Outlets has 160 stores and is one of the keys to Camarillo's economy.

Shopping for recovery Camarillo looks poised for growth

BY STEPHEN NELLIS
Staff Writer

Camarillo was hit as hard as anywhere else by the recession, but a mix of high-end technology and manufacturing businesses and a retail sector buoyed by the largest outlet mall in California could bode a strong recovery.

Some of the city's struggles in retail real estate are turning into opportunities for tri-county businesses that couldn't com-

pete with national chains for leases during rosier times. At the same time, city officials are laying the groundwork to revitalize the Dawson Drive area, once home to Imation, one of the city's largest employers. They're hoping for another turnaround like that of the area around Flynn Road, which has become home to many corporate headquarters that provide high-paying jobs.

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REGION WATCH
CAMARILLO

Deckers narrows choices

BY MARLIZE VAN ROMBURGH
Staff Writer

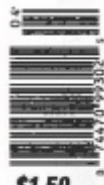
As Ugg boot company Deckers Outdoor Corp. strides toward a new South Coast headquarters, sites in Carpinteria, Goleta and at the Santa Barbara Municipal Airport have surfaced as potentially perfect fits.

Deckers isn't talking about its specific plans, but commercial real estate insiders told the Business Times that the company is close to a deal to build at the Lagunitas property in Carpinteria. A property at the Santa Barbara airport, near Deckers' current Goleta location, is also in the running, as is space in the Cabrillo Business Park on Hollister Avenue in Goleta.

Deckers announced in January that it plans to move its headquarters to a custom-built building sometime in 2012. Although CEO Angel Martinez wouldn't confirm exactly where the shoemaker plans to set up shop, he told the Business Times in a Nov. 11 interview that the firm's new digs would be officially announced in about a month.

"We're staying in the greater Santa Barbara area, that's for sure," he said.

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CAMARILLO

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But make no mistake — the recession visited sorrows upon Camarillo, especially in the residential real estate market, where new-home permits have dropped to zero, according to the California Lutheran University Center for Economic Research and Forecasting. It didn't help that the Village at the Park, one of the biggest master-planned developments in recent years, came online just as the real estate bubble was bursting.

"They got hammered. They were not spared the ax. They suffered mightily," CLU economist Dan Hamilton said of Camarillo's real estate market. "The recovery is not going to be there."

Instead, it will come from relatively high-paying jobs. Hamilton forecasts Camarillo to slowly climb to more than 4 percent GDP growth by 2012, slightly better than the rest of the state. But the number of new jobs will not be that large.

"What's driving the difference is productivity," he said. "For Camarillo, it's going to be the information sector, software, Internet technologies, aerospace and defense and skilled manufacturing. Other areas are not going to be as strong on those kinds of companies."

While retail sales are expected to be weak throughout the region and state, Camarillo has a secret weapon: a 160-store outlet mall that is the largest in California and draws visitors from around the state, nation and world. Camarillo Premium Outlets is the biggest single source of sales tax revenue for Camarillo.

"They get a lot of business from tourists there, and that is slightly less influenced by the doldrums," Hamilton said. "But it's still a weak retail situation overall."

In March, city officials predicted a \$1.3 million sales tax decrease. They had planned for no sales tax growth in most of the city, with a slight boost from The Promenade, which recently added about 40 stores to the outlets. Sales climbed steadily there but declined elsewhere in the city, officials said in a release.

Simon Property Group, which owns Premium Outlets, does not disclose any meaningful figures about its sales or foot traffic, but Brian Hassett, general manager of the Camarillo center, said more shoppers seem to be coming lately. The center features brands such as Cole Haan, Giorgio Armani and J. Crew.

"We can only say that the recent economic environment created some new outlet centers [shoppers] — people who for perhaps the first time, needed to seek extra value," Hassett said via e-mail. "We hope that these shoppers continue to shop with us even as the economy improves."

The center is touted as the most-visited destination in Ventura County, and Hassett said it does a "vibrant tourist business," though it also provides no data on foreign shoppers.

"The center is of high interest to international visitors — especially with its expanded offerings," Hassett said via e-mail.

Region Watch

Camarillo

Population (2010): 66,690

Median home price (2009): \$410,000

Mayor: Kevin Kildee

Chamber CEO: Tom Kelly

"We also are seeing meaningful growth from China."

A weak dollar helps the outlets because it means foreigners get American goods cheaper. Though China's leaders are grumbling about the Federal Reserve Bank's quantitative easing — the practice of buying up long-term debt to set a long-term inflation target, spurring domestic businesses to spend — China's citizens will get stellar deals at the outlets. Even if they stick to their allotted spending budgets, foreigners' currencies will translate into more U.S. dollars.

"Those folks will spend a little more than they would have otherwise, no question," said Hamilton, the CLU economist.

City officials have approved 500,000 square feet of big-box retail at Paseo Camino Real, just west of Camarillo Town Center, where Home Depot and other retailers are located. Bob Burrows, the city's community development director, said that site will probably be the city's "last big retail center."

As Camarillo works to absorb retail real estate, it's giving regional businesses an opportunity to move into spaces once occupied by chains. The former Sizzler on Daily Drive has been leased by the owner of Dargan's Irish Pubs in Ventura and Santa Barbara. Los Arroyos, a Santa Barbara Mexican restaurant, snatched a spot in The Promenade.

"It's giving the smaller guys a chance to have more reasonable economics and to have a chance at what the chains have taken," said Linda Hagelis, senior vice president with The Hagelis Group, which has worked several retail real estate deals recently in Camarillo.

Meanwhile, city officials have given the green light to an effort to revitalize Dawson Drive, a gateway to both Old Town Camarillo, where considerable redevelopment work has gone on, and Camarillo's Metrolink commuter train station. The city rolled out design guidelines earlier this year, with an eye toward attracting a large business that could take over a site where Imation, a data storage firm, closed its plant in 2008.

"We wanted to put some certainty into what people could look at, and we wanted to help existing businesses there," Burrows said. "This gives them some design concepts they can use in terms of master-planning the whole property. We had a lot of good input from businesses and the public."

• Stephen Nellis can be reached at snellis@pacbiztimes.com.



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