

GIVINGBACK

Partnership passes it forward for the kids

BY NINA RONDA
The Desert Sun

In this weekly feature, The Desert Sun spotlights valley firms performing good deeds. Here the focus is on an organization recycling its computers to benefit youth in the Coachella Valley.

Boys & Girls get computers

The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) recently donated seven gently-used computers with flat-screen monitors to Coachella Valley students.

Two students attending College of the Desert on scholarships through CVEP's Pathways to Success program received computers and the remaining five went to The Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley. "We are grateful that CVEP is always thinking about us and other nonprofit organizations as well as the needs of students in the valley," said Quinton Egson, chief professional officer of Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley. "Whenever people or organizations can make a contribution toward the education of kids, it also goes a long way in helping their families," added Egson.

Wesley Ahlgren, chief operating officer of CVEP, commented, "The computer donation was the most valuable way we could 'recycle' these lightly-used electronics. "It's a small but helpful part of the larger commitment to youth welfare and education we have made with our Pathways to Success program, which is dedicated to student support and building a college-educated workforce for the future economy of our region." CVEP's Pathways to Success program is now entering its third year. In scholarship funding alone, CVEP and its matching partners have provided nearly \$3 million in support to 423 students attending

48 different colleges and universities. For more information on CVEP and Pathways to Success, call (760) 340-1575 or visit www.cvep.org. For more information on Boys & Girls Club of Coachella Valley, call (760) 836-1160 or visit www.bgcofcv.org.

What is your business doing to give back to the Coachella Valley? Share your thoughts with us by e-mailing: Nina Ronda at nina.ronda@thedesertsun.com for our feature The Business of Giving Back.

BUSINESS BRIEF

rancho mirage Fundraising class and social hour event

The program "35 Ways to Maximize Fundraising Through Your Website" will be held from noon to 1:30 p.m. Jan. 21 at the Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa, 32-250 Bob Hope Drive, Rancho Mirage.

The Desert Communities Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals will present the event, which also features a social hour beginning at 11:30 a.m. The cost is \$25 for Association members, \$35 for other registrants and \$45 for those without a reservation. Call (760) 485-5986 or e-mail afpcadesert@gmail.com to make reservations.

— MIKE PERRAULT

ENTERPRISE: All hands on deck to battle

Continued from D1

■ Symposium, assembled by Riverside County officials from the Board of Supervisors and Economic Development Agency, on Monday in Cherry Valley. It has been endorsed by the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership. State Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez, the Coachella Democrat who chairs the committee on Jobs, Economic Development and the Economy, has been working on a reform legislation to ensure enterprise zones and redevelopment agency funding for communities are protected. Legislation is expected to be introduced in the coming weeks.

Michael Shepherd, who leads CVEP's legislative committee, said a wide cross-section of people are mobilizing and groups include chambers of commerce from across the state. "It's going to be a bloody, bruising battle and we will need all hands on deck," he said.

Save or cut?

CVEP and the Desert Lyceum have been at the forefront of a blueprint strategy to net 16,255 new jobs and more than \$2.3 billion in new wages from 2012 to 2016. Targeted areas to

achieve the goal include the enterprise zones. The Coachella Valley Enterprise Zone reaped \$41 million in total tax savings prospects for businesses and corporations in 2009 and issued a record-breaking 3,289 employer hiring credit vouchers. In 2010, there were 2,053 vouchers issued — some 1,842 involving new jobs. Shaw Properties and Beard Land Development Co. this year inked a deal in the enterprise zone that will put a Fortune 500 tenant, DaVita, in part of a 40,000-square-foot professional office complex that Orr Construction is building near Del Webb Sun City Palm Desert.

The project, expected to create 100-125 full-time jobs, will generate an estimated 120 construction jobs. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Thursday.

Daniel Fitzgerald, manager of the Calexico/Imperial County Enterprise Zone, said 342 vouchers — some 136 representing new jobs — were issued by some of the roughly 800 companies and businesses operating in its 15,000-acre zone. "We're in a unique position," he said. The area, where unemployment tops 30 percent, is viewed as fertile ground for companies

who want to position themselves near Mexico to enter the Latin American market.

"I'm working with two companies now, currently in Nevada and China, with potential to create 1,600 jobs," Fitzgerald said. "They're interested, but their margins are razor thin."

Losing tax or employee-hiring incentives may be a deal-breaker, he said.

"The message we are going to carry to all the decision-makers in California is — at a time we need to spur job growth — we can't look at taxing business out of California," said Yolanda Benson, a spokeswoman for the California Association of Enterprise Zones.

"We can't take away the kind of business you get by going into low-income or impoverished areas. I don't think that's a good selling point."

These zones also were structured as a three-way partnership, she said.

Eliminating the zones could eliminate tax credits that companies earned in prior years but have not yet been used, Benson said.

"Essentially, it's saying, you earned that, and now we're taking it away from you."

"I don't know if that's legal." The state Department of Finance has noted that elimination of the program could

save the state \$924 million. By Benson's calculation, the savings is \$350 million.

"That's nothing," she said. "It's budget dust."

Dan Carrig, legislative director with the California League of Cities, said work is going on at all levels to not only build a coalition, but to wake up communities about what's at stake.

"In the middle of an economic recession, when we're talking about how to grow more jobs, there shouldn't be as part of a plan to patch the hole a move to get rid of the two main economic development tools the state has, which are enterprise zones and redevelopment."

Potentially, Benson said, 3,000 jobs could be lost.

Some companies may pack their bags.

Weber's heard anecdotally the governor of a very large state is already trying to "cherry-pick" away some of the state's best companies.

"He sent an iPhone to a firm with a phone number and a note saying if and when you're ready to work with a state that treats business as an asset to give him a call," Weber said.

Debra Gruszecki covers tourism, restaurants, CVEP and Indian gaming for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at Debra.Gruszecki@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4643.

FEATURED HOMES OF THE WEEK

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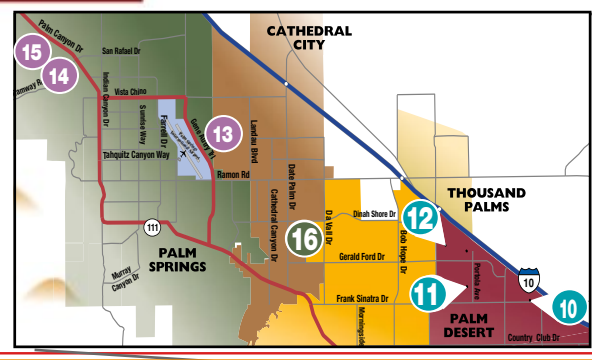
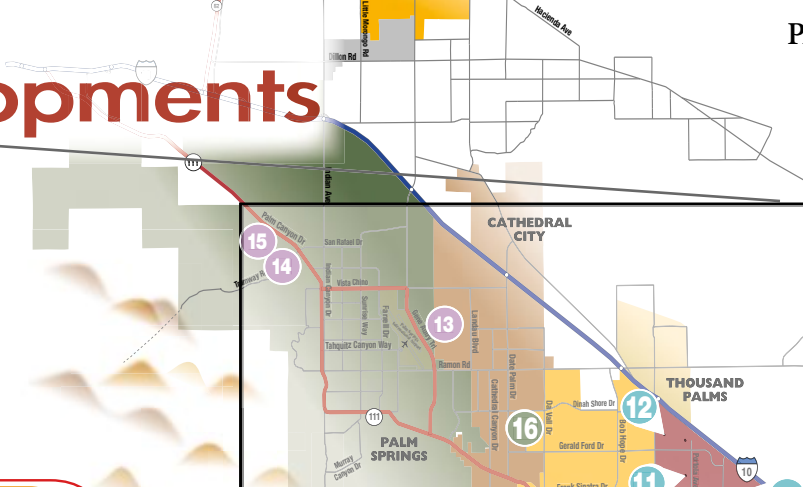
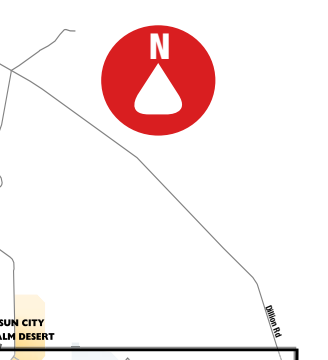
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