

# High Skills High Demand Education Forum Feb. 5, 2007

Over 100 business and community leaders gathered at last night's High Skills High Demand Education Forum to brainstorm and discuss solutions to the area's growing need for a high tech workforce. The forum began with a welcome from Big Bend Community College President Bill Bonaudi who thanked the audience for their willingness to tackle this important issue.

Following Bonaudi's remarks, Terry Brewer, Executive Director of the Grant County EDC, presented an update on the new businesses that are locating in Grant County. Brewer said that these businesses are going to invest over \$1.6 billion and add roughly 750 direct jobs to the economy.

Don Meseck, Regional Labor Economist for the Washington State Employment Security Department, echoed Brewer's comments saying that things are shaping up for 2007 to be the best year yet for Grant County job growth. Meseck showed that unemployment for 2006 was at historic lows as the county added 1,060 jobs over the year.

The next speaker was Tom Colegrove with Lee Technologies, the company that is handling mission critical infrastructure for Microsoft's new data center in Quincy. Lee Technologies currently has 15 employees in Quincy and they will need 50 more employees by the time the data center is complete.

Colegrove also gave a detailed explanation of the type of training those employees will need listing: HVAC technician, building monitoring systems, building management systems,

computerized maintenance management, and electrician apprenticeship.

Dean Martinez, Director of Administration for REC Silicon, spoke next and addressed the employment needs for the new \$600 million facility in Moses Lake. Training areas that employees will need to specialize in to be hired at REC Silicon include: control board operations, chemical operations, equipment troubleshooting, welding, and pipe and valve installation.

A panel discussion with Genie Industries, Big Bend Community College, Columbia Basin Job Corps, and Moses Lake High School came next. The panel described a unique partnership that provides training for Genie employees at the college, job corps, and high school. Genie donates welding equipment to the schools and the schools provided the training. Over 25 students have graduated from the classes and are currently employed at Genie.

The rest of the evening was devoted to brainstorming and discussing solutions that will bring educators and employers together to solve workforce issues. The most mentioned idea was to have employers visit the classrooms and inform students about the kinds of jobs and salaries that are available to them if they develop high tech skills.

After the forum attendees were encouraged to become part of a taskforce that will put the ideas generated at the meeting into action. To learn more, or to volunteer for the task force please contact Jonathan Smith at 509-764-6579 or Melinda Dourte at 509-793-2001.

