EDB ANNUAL MEETING: INNOVATION AND A WHOLE LOT MORE

Forty is looking good. On March 8, 2018, leaders from across the region came together at the Greater Tacoma Convention and Trade Center for the 40th EDB Annual Meeting. They heard an update on the EDB’s recruitment and retention work, celebrated the unveiling of the Excellent 10 and this year’s Golden Shovel Award winner, and listened to a panel of local experts talk about innovation in their industry sectors.

EDB Board Chair Greg Unruh, president of the Franciscan Foundation, welcomed the more than 550 guests. “Your support of our mission to grow high-wage jobs in Tacoma-Pierce County is vital,” Unruh said. “Economic development is a team sport, and your efforts both financial and otherwise are important as we all work together to help companies make the decision to invest and grow jobs in this market.”

Bruce Kendall, EDB president and CEO, reported that for every dollar invested in the EDB the organization returns $114 to the South Sound economy. Over the last five years (2013–2017) the EDB has helped companies create or retain more than 3,900 jobs. These firms invested more than $400 million in Pierce County and paid more than $196 million in wages annually.

Kendall reiterated the EDB’s mantra, Compete Every Day Forever, noting that in 2017 the EDB met with 168 Pierce County companies ranging from manufacturing to finance to technology to distribution. Key recruitment projects for 2017 include Associated Materials (100 jobs, $8 million investment) and Fibro Corp (70 jobs, $1 million investment). Business and retention wins include Infoblox, James Hardie and Wilcox Family Farms. The complete report for 2017 is on the EDB website at bit.ly/EDBreports.

Over the last year, the EDB’s recruitment efforts and Pierce County’s quality of life have garnered considerable attention, prompting hundreds of media mentions and several accolades. “You’re a popular group,” Kendall told the crowd. “All these media platforms have discovered Tacoma-Pierce County and are telling the world to invest here, meet here and live here.”

Cranes, Planes and Brains

Looking ahead, how can we all play a part in winning and keeping great jobs in the South Sound? Innovation. Kendall framed the concept through three lenses:

• Cranes symbolize a project reaching the final building stage and signal that the jobs are on the way. Kendall cited several construction projects in progress and in the works in Tacoma-Pierce County, along with the celebrated arrival of the super-post-Panamax cranes to the Port of Tacoma.

• Planes. The RFP for a New Mid-market Airplane (NMA) is due to arrive this year, and the EDB will be ready for the big state-versus-state competition.

• Brains. Pierce County is home to several innovative high-tech companies, and the University of Washington Tacoma has been a key driver of our tech growth. With the arrival the Readiness Acceleration and Innovation Network (RAIN) life sciences incubator and SURGETacoma tech incubator, and co-working space at the Union Club, the stage is set. Kendall urged attendees to explore and support these valuable assets.

The Excellent 10

This year’s Excellent 10 are projects selected by the EDB for their positive impact on the Pierce County economy in the previous year. The winners are, in alphabetical order: 7 Seas Brewing Company (Tacoma); American Job Center (Joint Base Lewis-McChord); Behavioral Health Hospital (Tacoma); Foothills Trail extension (East Pierce County); Infoblox (Tacoma); Lakewood-Tacoma Logistics Center (Lakewood); New Sound Transportation (Fife); RAIN (Tacoma); Union Club (Tacoma); and Wilcox Family Farms (Roy). Full project descriptions are available on the EDB website at edbtacomapierce.com.

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Golden Shovel goes to the University of Washington Tacoma

The **Golden Shovel Award** is presented annually to organizations or individuals that have made significant contributions to the economic wellbeing of Tacoma and Pierce County. This year’s recipient is **UW Tacoma**, recognized for its impact on the economic, cultural and educational health of the South Sound and the state of Washington. UW Tacoma President Mark Pagano and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Jill Purdy accepted the honor on behalf of UW Tacoma’s 800 current faculty and staff, 5,185 current students, 20,150 alumni, countless thousands of former students, faculty and staff, and donors and community supporters. “All these people believe in the transformative impact higher education can have on the region and in the world,” Pagano said.

**Innovation works**

In a panel discussion moderated by Tom Larson, **KBTC** managing editor and producer-host of **Northwest Now**, representatives spanning industry sectors weighed in on innovation: Andrew Fry, director of Industry Partnerships, **UW Tacoma Institute of Technology**; Carla Santorno, superintendent, **Tacoma Public Schools**; Debbie Lee, CEO, **Tool Gauge**; and Dona Ponepinto, president and CEO, **United Way of Pierce County**.

Does Tacoma-Pierce County have what it takes to be innovative? Absolutely, the panelists agreed. “It’s part of everyday life,” Fry said. Santorno joked that the first step to innovating is to “leave the lawyers at home” to successfully foster creativity. Lee said Tool Gauge focuses on cultivating talent and capacity in its workforce. Ponepinto stressed the importance of working with a variety of partners from the across the community to alleviate poverty.


**SEATTLE’S QUESTIONABLE WEIGH-IN ON LNG FACILITY**

Kudos to **The News Tribune**. The paper’s recent opinion piece about Seattle’s late-to-the-party “concerns” over the proposed liquefied natural gas plant (LNG) on the **Tacoma Tideflats** nails our sentiments perfectly.