

## Experts urge South Jersey to grow now for future success

By **ELAINE ROSE** Staff Writer | **Posted: Wednesday, October 19, 2011 7:33 pm**

**GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP** - As casino revenue declines, the three areas in which South Jersey can create economic growth are aviation, health care and education, a panel of experts told about 200 business and political leaders Wednesday at Richard Stockton College.

But the community has to form a united front and get its act together quickly, before other regions develop the advantages that Atlantic County already has, the experts said at the forum, "Beyond the Boardwalk: Regional Opportunities for Business and Growth in a Changing Economy."

County Executive Dennis Levinson said the economic climate of the region has changed.

"The days of easy money are over," and Atlantic County blew the head start it had over the rest of the East Coast to create a destination resort, Levinson said.

Panelists had several ideas to get the process moving.

Aviation is the cornerstone of a global economy, and the NextGen revolution in air-traffic control is a major part, said Larry Williams, a former director of the William J. Hughes Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township who now lives in Virginia.

While other states have several initiatives, South Jersey has the unique facility and all the elements to put NextGen together, Williams said, adding that every job in the research park creates another 2.6 jobs in the community.

The first building of the proposed research park needs to be erected - soon - and it will be filled with tenants within a year, Williams said.

"If we don't take the ball ... we're going to lose the opportunity," Williams said. "Some other state, some other area, will take over the air-space center."

Health care is a growing field, as baby boomers gradually enter the age group in which they need increased medical services, said Ira Peezeck, vice president of strategic planning for AtlantiCare. Of the 103,000 jobs created in the United States last month, 44,000 were in health care.

But the current health system is designed to treat people when they get hurt or sick, not to keep them well, Peezeck said. The transition to accountable-care organizations, as mandated by last year's health reform law, will result in providers being paid for the number of people they care for, not only treating the sick.

Construction of new health facilities will include more outpatient and ambulatory clinics and fewer hospitals, and employment will grow in those areas as well, Peezeck said.

South Jersey is ready to be a center of renewable energy, with offshore wind farms, solar and other resources, said Tim Lizura Sr., vice president of finance and development for the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

But 21st-century workers need to be trained not just for the job they have today, but to prepare for the ones they will need in the future, said Cynthia Sosnowski, associate dean of Stockton's School of Graduate and Continuing Studies.

Public schools and colleges have to give students the foundation of workplace skills and training for a specific job, Sosnowski said. But to prepare them for a career, they also will need mentoring, internships, externships and other training.

Business, education and government in South Jersey need to band together to train the work force the area will need in coming decades, Sosnowski said. It's no longer a zero-sum game, in which one group's gain is another's loss. If everyone doesn't work together, everyone loses, she said.

South Jersey has to develop a single message and one source for potential investors to turn to for help in setting up their businesses, said Ken Calemno, past president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber.

Keynote speaker Joel Naroff, president of Naroff Economic Advisors, began by asking people who thought the recession is over to raise their hands. Only three people in the nearly filled auditorium did so.

The recession officially ended in June 2009, but it does not feel that way to most people, Naroff said. He expects growth to remain slow over the next three to five years, because the housing industry, the financial industry and governments have been slow to rebound.

But there will be growth in some select areas, and South Jersey can capitalize on trends, Naroff said.

Many retiring baby boomers will move to the shore homes that they rented out or used only on weekends, Naroff said. They will seek nearby restaurants and cultural activities that Atlantic City and Stockton can provide, and they will need more health services as they age.

Area businesses will fight for pieces of a smaller pie of government funding, and will have to show why they deserve a slice, Naroff said.

Howard Kyle, chief of staff for Atlantic County, ended the forum on a positive note, saying that community leaders are ready to do what it takes to make the area thrive.

"We're not ending it today. We're starting it today," Kyle said.

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