

Reno job growth impacting Lake Tahoe



Mike Kazmierski, president and CEO of Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada, talks Aug. 7 in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Anne Knowles

By Anne Knowles

Lake Tahoe businesses are going to be facing increasing competition from Reno employers for a range of workers.

That's the downside of anticipated growth in the Reno area led by Tesla Motor's battery factory and Switch's data center, both under construction at the Tahoe Reno Industrial Center, the 107,000-acre business park nine miles east of the Northern Nevada city.

Tesla alone is expected to employ 6,500 people when its factory is fully operational, and that's just a fraction of the 52,400 new jobs expected in the next five years in the Reno area, according to Mike Kazmierski, president and CEO of the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada.

Kazmierski told members of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber

of Commerce and others on Aug. 7 that EDAWN helped create more than 4,000 jobs last year, through recruitment of existing companies, local start-ups and expansion of established businesses, and is waiting to announce the relocation of more than a dozen new companies bringing a total of 1,425 jobs.

EDAWN expects 4.5 percent job growth in the Reno area between now and 2019.

"There will be competition for workforce," said Kazmierski at the Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel lunch meeting.

"I think that's where we're going to feel it," said B. Gorman, chamber CEO. "My concern is I talk to businesses every day who are having trouble hiring people right now."

The audience of about 65 was concerned, too, but more seemed to welcome Reno's resurgence.

When Sandy Evans-Hall, Tahoe Prosperity Center board member, asked if people were worried about Reno's growth, a few hands went up. But when she asked who saw it as an opportunity for their business, about half the people in the room raised a hand.

Kazmierski, too, said there would be plenty of upside for the Tahoe region. He said air service to the Reno Tahoe International Airport would improve, a boon for the visitor traffic Lake Tahoe relies on.

The new companies locating in Northern Nevada will do more business at the lake, as will many of their employees, who are largely expected to be younger.

"Millennials like to be outdoors," said Kazmierski.

And there will be more quality job opportunities for locals.

"Your kids and grandkids can stay here and you can keep your family close," he said.

EDAWN, along with a coalition of area cities and counties, as well as state agencies and infrastructure entities such as NV Energy, the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County and the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, have been working on a study of the expected impact of the growth.

Kazmierski said the EPIC report, to be released in September, would provide the data needed for the area to prepare.

"We've got to get ahead of the no-growthers before they close the door," said Kazmierski, referring to interests, including some on the Reno City Council and elsewhere, who are opposed to growth.

Kazmierski was asked if water was a limiting factor.

"Water is absolutely no problem for the Reno-Sparks area," he said. "We don't brag about it because of the drought here in California."

Kazmierski said there is enough water available in the Truckee Meadows to double the population.

"If we got serious about conservation, we could probably triple the population," he said.

But at least one attendee was skeptical.

"I think he's misguided on the water," Garry Bowen, of Tahoe Future Forum, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Bowen said he helped commission a study on area sustainability by the American Institute of Architects in 2005. The report included an assessment of water quantity and quality.

"I think he's being misled," said Bowen. "It just doesn't compute."