

Conclusion: What's Next

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With the bursting of the housing bubble, many Boiseans who fueled the economy by filling restaurants, shopping centers and the ranks of the middle class now find themselves in a hole they can't climb out of, yet. Many residents may face a decade of lost wages, lost savings and lost homes before they see their personal economies turn around. Some will never recover the stability that market forces ripped away from them. The effects of this prolonged recession don't stop there. Since parental wealth and education are good predictors of the opportunities kids have, an entire generation of Boise children may have far fewer

chances to bootstrap their way out of poverty by the time an economic recovery is underway. So what's next for Boise? To gain some perspective, here are some ideas from community leaders.



David H. Bieter

is mayor of Boise.

Boise is a city forged from adversity. From the beginning, our arid climate made agriculture difficult. For decades, the nation's railroads passed us by. Even today, we remain the most geographically isolated metropolitan area in the Lower 48 states.

Time and again, though, Boise has conquered these challenges. Our remoteness has inspired great resourcefulness and resilience; our hardships have yielded

greater energy and creativity. The people who come here recognize our city as an oasis in the desert—"a bright green gem in a setting of blue," as Clarence Darrow once described us.

No wonder so many visitors stay. No wonder Boise consistently ranks as one of the healthiest, most economically vibrant and most livable communities in the nation.

Hard times, like harsh conditions, can be a source of strength. And so it will be, I believe, with the Great Recession. By most metrics, Boise has suffered more than most of our peers in the Intermountain West during this, the worst financial downturn in generations.

But as we have throughout our history, Boise has endured. In my regular conversations with owners, managers and workers in companies of every size, I sense abundant optimism—not just that better times are coming, but a real determination to create those good times.

To do so, we must continue to diversify our local economy to make the transition from resource-based regional markets to information-based global ones. We cannot continue to rely so heavily on housing construction, an

industry and a market that may never regain their former vigor. Most of all, we must continue to enhance our outstanding quality of life, which is the real reason that businesses and workers and families want to make Boise their home.

There is no passive road to prosperity; getting there requires serious investment in the fundamentals—education, transportation and communication infrastructure and economic development—and a lot of hard work. I have no doubt that Boise is up to the task.



Lisa McGrath

is an attorney who specializes in new media law and the Internet.

I think there is a disconnect between university curriculum and the needs of the marketplace, which means that recent graduates are walking out of universities with degrees but not the skills for the job.

In the local software development industry, for example, there became such a deficit in the quantity and quality of

job candidates that outside technology groups, such as the Idaho Technology Council Software Alliance, stepped in and partnered with universities, industry professionals and businesses to implement practical educational and internship programs for computer science students and to build community collaboration across the industry. This problem isn't isolated to the technology industry. I've seen the same issues in legal, health care and other sectors. The solution starts with a conversation between universities and businesses about how to best align curriculum and training at the university level with the needs of the marketplace.

Boise is becoming fat with tech startups, but there is no one-stop company or nonprofit that assists entrepreneurs with legal counsel, advertising, marketing, accounting, software development and venture capital in order to grow a viable business. For example, a software engineer could develop a

brilliant product but may not know the critical role that legal counsel, marketing and accounting play in running a successful business—or even where to go to find such services. Many startups fail for this reason.

Currently, many local professional business associations focus on bringing established companies into the state as a way to boost the economy, but long-term economic development will come from supporting and growing existing startups and future entrepreneurs in Idaho. That's where the jobs will come from.



Landis Rossi

is executive director of Catholic Charities of Idaho and a board member of United Way.

Boise is a community of individuals who show compassion for one another, and that has been demonstrated over and over again during these difficult economic times. We are starting to see the unemployment numbers decline and other signs that we are on the path to recovery, but we have to remember that “recovery” will take many years, and indi-

viduals and families will need time get back on their feet. My hope is that members of Boise's community and citizens across the state of Idaho remain cognizant of the continued needs that low- and middle-income families face.

Idahoans are proud people who value family, faith, community and independence. We are also people of compassion. In a time when so many are struggling from the effects of economic, emotional and spiritual poverty, offering compassion, without judgment, is more important than ever.