

Arizonans working together: It's about time

By Diane Brossart

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Finally!

Arizona is coming to grips with the notion of collaboration. Sometimes it takes a crisis to motivate, like a recession or political dysfunction. But whatever the reason, there's a silver lining for all of us who have made this place our home.

Arizona Forward is coalescing business and civic leaders statewide around a sustainability agenda to help ensure the environmental quality and economic prosperity of our cities and towns. Arizona Forward boasts a 43-year history as the respected voice of balance under Valley Forward Association, focusing on Maricopa County. Now in its second year of operations statewide, it's primed to promote Arizona through a holistic approach and unified voice.

Short-term results are impressive. Four major counties are now on board — Pima, Pinal, Maricopa and Coconino. So are all three public universities — the University of Arizona, Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University. The business sector is also well represented, with diverse companies both large and small. To further flex its expanded presence in southern and northern regions, Arizona Forward inducted Tucson native, Janice Cervelli, dean of the UA College of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture, as its 2014 board chairwoman.

The membership's basic agenda revolves around issues affecting growing population centers and rural communities

alike encompassing concerns we should all care about, like clean air, an abundant water supply and renewable energy options. Add to the list open spaces for recreation and smart land-use decisions that integrate transportation and connectivity.



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Healthy communities are at the heart of Arizona Forward's mission, and the organization is empowering people to influence our state's destiny. Nearly 300 attended the group's Stewardship Summit, a first-time event that drew nine mayors from municipalities spanning the Grand Canyon State. In stepping out of its Valley-centric roots, Arizona Forward is cultivating education and outreach for residents with varying economic, social and political affiliations.

The science-based, objective primers it produces explain complex, controversial topics in layman's terms, engaging Arizonans in meaningful dialogue, collaboration and shared advocacy to facilitate effective sustainability initiatives.

Arizona Forward is leading conversations about our state's natural resources — how to improve the health of our forests and sustain our park system. But more than a think tank, Arizona Forward is a do-tank, taking positions on issues closely aligned to its mission.

Among its milestone achievements are: leading efforts to restore the Salt River resulting in the Tempe Town Lake and Phoenix Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area; advocacy for light rail and transit; resource provider for K-12 environmental

education; leader on policies to protect funding for Arizona's parks and open spaces; umbrella stakeholder for the International Trade Corridor and expanding Arizona's cross-border commerce with Mexico; and serving as a clearinghouse for information and resources on sustainability initiatives.

Gone are the days of parochialism and turf battles — we're in this together. The age-old adage, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall," offers as an encouraging approach in which to funnel our passion for a stronger, more sustainable Arizona — at last!

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