

Eloy Enterprise > Top Stories

EDGE panel discusses outlook for Eloy

Print Page

By **ROBBY GAL**
Staff Writer

Published: Thursday, September 24, 2009 8:14 AM MST

Executive Director of EDGE (Economic Development Group of Eloy) Gayle Cooper brought an expert panel of leaders from various industries together to discuss the future of Eloy this past Tuesday at Robson Ranch.

The panel included Jim Rounds of Elliot Pollack and Associates, City of Eloy Manager Joe Blanton, Ben Belkin of Walton International Group, Court Rich of Rose Law Group, and Rick Brammer of Applied Economics.

Jim Rounds quickly updated everyone on the state of the economy, since he was last in town a couple months ago. Rounds explained that many are proclaiming the economy has hit rock bottom, and in a few areas, we have; but he cautioned those in attendance to look at absolute levels when comparing the numbers for the economy. Rounds pointed out that in many areas including income, housing, and overall growth where we are seeing positives, we still have to be prepared for slow recovery. When last quarter income levels were at -11 percent, a flat income percentage doesn't mean we're back to positive. His introductory message was an optimistic one, yet very conservative and cautious.



Staff photo by Robby Gal, Jim Rounds (left) of Elliot D. Pollack and Associates speaks during the panel discussion on the state of the economy last week at Robson Ranch on Tuesday, Sept. 15. Waiting their turn to speak (left to right) are Court Rich of Rose Law Group, Rick Brammer of Applied Economics, Ben Belkin of Walton International Group, and City of Eloy Manager Joe Blanton.

The biggest indicator that the economy is getting closer to the bottom of the U-shaped graph for Rounds is that new business loan standards have loosened. For a while after the economic bust, new business loans were very difficult to obtain because banks wanted to keep the risky loans from being started. Now, Rounds explains, he and his company are seeing standards loosening. This indicator is one that Rounds says will start the recovery and have many of the economic indicators on the right side of the graph starting the upswing.

Rounds did explain that though some positive signs are starting to blossom, you still lose jobs in a recovery, and Eloy won't be immune to this side effect of a slow economic turnaround.

Rounds also pointed out that recovery will be even tougher for us here in Arizona, because the last time he spoke Arizona was 48th in the country at job growth. Now Arizona has the dubious title of being 50th in job growth.

"It's very discouraging. We're the only state that at one time, we were first in job growth and now we're 50th," Rounds said

Rounds explained out that a main reason for the number is the over-production in real estate. And now we're at the point that in every sector, we're losing jobs.

Though production will continue and get better, Rounds still believes that the greater Phoenix area won't get back to normal supply and demand until 2015.

Gayle Cooper then took the microphone and led a discussion with the panel.

The group started with discussing crtttt`2wa. Cooper explained that in the discussions education was deliberately left out so they could revisit the topic in its own discussion at a later date.

Rounds explained that in regards to companies getting started, they will have very specific needs and standards when they start that business.

Court Rich of the Rose Law Group, found that with infrastructure as it relates to Eloy, it is important to focus on the things you do have to offer. And for Rich, the location of the freeway, the railroad, and Eloy's middle ground between Tucson and Phoenix are assets. Rick Brammer of Applied Economics agreed with Rich about concentrating on assets, but to also look at resources such as water and sewer. If you have good infrastructure in those areas, he said, then you are going to attract those companies to the area.

Ben Belkin of the Walton International Group saw Interstates 10 and 8, and the various highways in the area as great assets. In regards to the current infrastructure, Belkin said Eloy is well-equipped to handle the current needs and has future infrastructure plans to accommodate more business. City Manager Joe Blanton explained the city's infrastructure in a more regional approach.

"In the last three or four years, we've been able to complete some master plans, including a master water plan, a sewer plan, and a master streets plan. We're updating our general plan and we look at it as a region. And the region for Eloy is about a 545 square mile planning area. And what these plans do is give the area some certainty about what the solution is," Blanton explained.

Blanton also added that they are meeting to discuss infrastructure solutions as they pertain to Eloy and how to attract more industrial business with Eloy's current assets.

The panel moved on to ways that Eloy can be marketed to target more business and attract attention to the city. Blanton explained that one of the most important things is to change the reputation that Eloy has, whether it's seen as a gas-stop between Phoenix and Tucson or not, but to try to improve the image of the city. And we also need to take advantage of the fact that Eloy has a lot of available industrial land, he said.

Ben Belkin and Court Rich both saw Eloy as a positive. The two agreed that Eloy's location and rich land is a great marketing tool. But Rick Brammer and Jim Rounds had a different vantage point. They saw looking more at Eloy's weaknesses as strength in marketing.

"There are a lot of disadvantages here, and a lot of the negative myths aren't myths. But this place (Eloy) has great long-term potential, but there is going to be a lot of problems in the short-term in terms of business locations. What you have to do is figure out where you fit in the overall region and what the status of the economy is," Rounds said.

Rounds preached to be aware of your weaknesses as they pertain to marketing, and knowing what you can't do as well as what you can is just as important in the discussion. Because blindly hoping to attract businesses and retail to the area without a concentrated look at an area is wasting time in a down economy, he explained.

Brammer also focused on the positives once the weaknesses were illuminated:

"Get rid of the misinformation. Talk about labor, talk about accessibility between the Phoenix and Tucson markets, talk about the water, and talk about the fact that not everyone is a retiree," a point Brammer made which brought a chuckle from the audience.

The panel then switched to ways of establishing a niche for Eloy. Rounds explained that Eloy needs to be aware that it's competing with a lot of other companies that have Phoenix and Tucson as an option, as well. Rounds and Brammer both agreed again that when searching for a niche, Eloy can't get too broad with its search. Find a niche that is selective and can offer something that maybe Casa Grande or Maricopa can't, he said.

"Eloy needs to create some luster, and some synergy that they can build from. You do have labor force accessibility coming from the north and south and that should help you," Brammer said.

Belkin agreed that finding a specialized niche is the key, but to be very specific.

"If we are in fact going to position ourselves as an industrial niche, it would first be important to understand the needs of an industrial user within that niche," Belkin cautioned.

City Manager Blanton explained Eloy's niche from a planning standpoint.

"When I got here [as a planner], I kept hearing that I-10 was our industrial corridor; but looking at our general plan map, roughly two-thirds of it was zoned or designated as low-density residential, with master planned communities east of Sunland Gin road between I-10 and Highway 84 that included RV parks, manufactured homes, and nine-hole golf courses. And that has since been re-designated or re-zoned to a 578-acre rail-serve industrial park. So over the past few years through the planning department we have designated that corridor from Eleven Mile Corner to Sunland Gin Road as industrial. So it provides us with the land availability to market to industrial users," Blanton explained.

Blanton was excited to talk about the "pro-growth council" that is always excited to see a good project and is willing to discuss incentives to get the right company to Eloy, indicating employment and the industrial community as Eloy's niche.

The panel then finished up with the affirmation that Eloy has the right leadership to compete in the market right now and a focused plan for the future. The panel agreed that Eloy seems poised to compete for businesses in Pinal County in the future. Blanton expressed the joy it is to work with the EDGE Council - and when Judge Wilson told him about EDGE, and how Eloy had it years ago, Blanton was quick to help get it back. He thinks of EDGE as an "extension of his staff."

The panel discussion was an eye-opener for many, and an affirmation to some that Eloy has some work to do, but that the leaders of the community have a firm grasp of where Eloy is going and can be in the years to come.

Copyright © 2009 - Tri Valley Central

[\[x\] Close Window](#)