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News



Pajaro Valley Entrepreneurial Fair and Expo to be held Sunday

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BY: BOB WALCH

Interested in learning about the best business practices, or perhaps showcasing your own business? The first Pajaro Valley Entrepreneurial Fair and Expo will provide the opportunity for participants to do just that, plus network with potential vendors and customers.

Best of all, the event, held this Sunday at the Watsonville Civic Plaza, is free to the public. Funded by grants from the National Rural Funders Collaborative and Comerica Bank, the fair is being presented by the El Pájaro Community Development Corporation along with its partners, the Central Coast Small Business Development Center and the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association.

Designed to cultivate connections between farmers and businesses, the fair will feature an expo room where local farmers and business owners can showcase and sell their goods and services. Although there is no admission charge for attending the fair, there is a nominal charge for a booth. Carmen Herrera-Mansir, executive director of El Pájaro, said the cost of a booth ranges from \$30 to \$200, depending on the size of the business and whether or not the sponsor attends a pre-expo training session.

Restaurants are welcome to register for a booth, but they may not actually prepare food on the premises. However, they may give away samples of pre-prepared food.

The booth registration fees will be donated to scholarship programs for the Small

Farmers' Education Program, Women's Business Education and Loan Program, or the Cabrillo Advancement Program. The participant can indicate which of these funds his booth registration fee will be applied to.

The training sessions, which will be in both Spanish and English, will deal with a variety of topics from how to start a business or increase sales of an existing business, to how to get financing and deal with government regulations.

The keynote speaker for the day will be Carlos Mendoza, the Fresno district director of the Small Business Administration.

The opening panel will feature a group of successful small-business owners who will share their experiences and be available for a question-and-answer session.

"We want these men and women to be role models for other people who might be considering starting a business," Herrera-Mansir said.

The panel includes Ricardo Rocha of RV's Computers Inc.; Joni Chapel, who owns a cheese company; Rogelio Ponce, a conventional farmer; and Maria Luz Reyes, owner of La Milpa Organica Farms. Rocha started his business as part of El Pájaro's "incubator program," and Reyes got her start through ALBA.

After the panel presentation, participants will have the opportunity to attend either a session on starting a business conducted by Vinicio Vides or one for established business owners on how to increase sales.

The final two choices of the afternoon are concurrent panels on the farmer and chef connection and a discussion on managing financing and government regulations.

Herrera-Mansir stressed that besides the information attendees can glean from these informative sessions, the entire day provides an opportunity to network with other business people as well as organizations that offer assistance to the fledgling entrepreneur as well as the existing small business. She said that this is a day dedicated to both education and meeting people who either have similar business aspirations or have succeeded in starting a business.

The fair is not just geared toward those interested in starting a business. It is also for those who are already established and are thinking about expansion or, perhaps, are having problems realizing their goals. There will be consultants available to answer any specific questions a participant may have.

"With the way the economy is right now, this is a good place for people to learn about the resources available to help them," Herrera-Mansir said. "It is also important for people to know that our services are free to the community."

For this inaugural Pajaro Valley Entrepreneurial Fair and Expo, the executive director

of El Pájaro is hoping for an attendance of between 100-200 people. She expects there will be about 30 or more booths.

“The idea is to create some exposure for local businesses,” she said. “We hope that number actually exceeds our projections.”

Although a lot of people have worked hard to make this day a reality, Herrera-Mansir singled out the efforts of Teresa Thomae, director of the Central Coast Small Business Development Center; Brett Malone and Patrica Carrillo of ALBA; and event coordinator Sanja Lanka, who helped organize the fair.

The first of what is planned to be a series of these fairs held over the next five years, Herrera-Mansir said that a second fair and expo this year will be held in Salinas in the fall.

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