

Thank you for coming today—on the most beautiful spring break day—ever.

I was really excited when Blue Ridge asked me to be today's speaker . I was anxious to talk about the many partnerships and projects that 20/20 has had the opportunity to be a part of in its first six months. I wanted to share some of the progress. The holistic side of economic development is so very important to the future of our county. And by the way, economic development isn't just the job of Harry Whalen, the EDC or the government. It is a responsibility belonging to all of us. And that's why we are here.

I was looking forward to a hopeful and positive meeting here today about progress on the economic development front. And then came that Saturday morning's headline, the release of the January unemployment number. What a shock. Didn't expect that kind of a jump.

Well, there is no time like the present –and the unemployment rate is a huge factor in what 20/20 has set out to do. No use in trying to ignore the elephant in the room. Let's deal with him and eventually get him out!

The number one issue facing Caldwell County is high unemployment. Or is it?

17.5% of our workforce is unemployed. In recent years we have found ourselves in the top tier for unemployment—consistently.

And folks seem to always want to say “If only a major manufacturer would locate here. If only one or two factories would open. A new industry would do the trick.

It's going to take a lot more than that to fix a 17.5% number. There is no silver bullet—no “just one or two” of anything that will substantially lower that number. We are talking about 4000 to 8000 jobs.

But what if I could stand here and tell you that there is something—that if we just had it here—that that something would guarantee substantial improvement in that number?

I am here to tell you that there is a SOMETHING. That it is in other counties and if we had it here would be vastly improved. What is it and how do we find it?

I challenge you to change the way you think. Change how we have approached this issue for a moment.

Instead of looking into a dark crystal ball at our unemployed numbers, let's look at the numbers of those who have consistently been better than us—not just better but substantially better—even in this tough national economy.

It isn't geography, average household income, not a specific industry, or an interstate running through them—none of these issues by itself always protect or buffer other county's workforces from unemployment.

It's educational attainment. The counties with the higher percentages of bachelor's degrees, associate degrees, some college, and certainly high school diplomas—those counties have a more diverse workforce based on education and can adapt to changing economies. Caldwell, since manufacturing and textiles have experienced the greatest job losses—has not been resilient as in years ago. Other counties have. I challenge you to think about what this means. Caldwell

has been consistently in the top ten % of NC's counties for unemployment and in the bottom 10% in educational attainment of adults over 25 with bachelor's degrees. Think about what that means. It's partly good news, because there is something in our own power that we can do to fix it. Watauga, 6th in NC educational attainment—consistently over the last ten years has had nearly half the unemployment % that Caldwell has had--even today—9%. Dare, Lincoln, Burke and Avery and Catawba—all with room to improve in their educational attainment but better than ours, all with proportionately less unemployment over the last ten years. (This yardstick doesn't apply to all counties in every month, but it is a significant factor and one which WOULD improve our workforce dramatically without question.)

This is something we can get our arms around. And don't you think it plays far better to say to a HS student wavering about dropping out—to say that people with educations DO fair better in life? He might not be so easy to follow his parent's footsteps. And those who did leave for a factory job just might begin to see that even a HS diploma or a GED can turn the tide substantially.

Now here's the part I know you're thinking. OK, we prevent the drop out. What is really out there for him—with or without an education in today's economy.

I am so glad you asked that question. Let's keep changing the way we think.

We have got to prepare ourselves and our students for the next generation of jobs and industry. Let me share with you a recent study done by NC State along with the Dept of Commerce.

Creative thinking, the kind that fuels innovation is now the world's most valued commodity.

If NC is to remain competitive in today's new economy our 21st century job strategy must focus on creativity, imagination and invention. The same holds true for Caldwell County.

Global forces have already undermined agriculture, textiles, manufacturing and electronics.

ENTER: the Knowledge Economy. Google talks about it all the time. And education is certainly at the heart of it all. We (NC) are well positioned to take advantage of it—we have the best university system and the best Community College System in the country. We DO HAVE the best community college—and today the best basketball team!

But guess what—highly trained and lower paid workers in other countries across the world are now reproducing our knowledge products –again as with manufacturing—threatening our ability to compete on price, quality and much of the 20th century expertise we have always been proud of.

ENTER THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

According to author Daniel Pink, In the creative economy more and more jobs are beginning to depend on a more complex set of skills—right brain skills problem solving, communications, entrepreneurship and collaborative efforts.

It isn't that the 20th century left brain skills are not necessary-- they aren't enough to increase our capacity to grow. In today's economy we need to develop not just artists, architects, designers, photographers. According to the

Pew Center on the States, creative jobs include teachers, marketers, medical researchers, geographers, chemists and the list goes on.

The key to success in this area is to pool workforce resources, create new products, re-imagine old ideas, recognize opportunities, connect dots and be about creating new solutions to increasingly tough problems. And in a way, isn't that what furniture is currently having to do? We are all reinventing ourselves—inventing the future.

Let me briefly give you the nuts and bolts side of this as well.

2009 Creative Occupations in NC earned \$59,200 state avg is \$36,697 US avg 40,459 Caldwell median per person income in 2008 was \$33,000 for a man and \$30,000 for a woman. Wouldn't you like to see the bar raised? Can't you imagine the community benefit?

And by the way, these wages were equally available in metro areas and non metro areas

Creative jobs had faster job growth numbers from 2002 to 2008

All job growth then in NC was 13.3% Creative saw a 21.1 % increase

And NC creative jobs outpaced US which was 15.5%

Creative jobs have slower job loss have seen only a 2.4% loss.

NC non metro areas saw even slower job loss than metro 1.2% versus 2.6%

So, creative jobs are good for rural communities and non metro areas.

Creative jobs represent 69 occupations throughout many sectors of the economy.

28% Ed training curators

18% Art, design, entertainment, media

17% computer and math and science

17 % management

6% personal care and service

14% a host of all other

Education and training a critical factor

51% those jobs require a bachelor's degree 19% masters 10% doctorate

12% can get in with OJT 4% associates degree 4% some other training

Can you see that if we begin to change the way we think we may find new solutions to ridding ourselves of the elephant in the room. I hope I have challenged you to change the way you think.

Caldwell 20/20's job is to keep us thinking ahead of the curve, to do some of the long range thinking and preparation. Our mission is to build public private partnerships and strategies that will increase Caldwell's capacity to grow and compete successfully—in this new economy. We are the holistic part of economic development.

And much is going on. I INVITE YOU TO OUR NEW WEBSITE

WWW.CALDWELL2020.ORG where our first pages will be up and running at the end of this month (April). You will see the exciting collaborative efforts taking place in our community forging us ahead in economic development. There are

four areas of concentration: Competitive Workforce/Education; Economic Opportunity; Civic Pride and Leadership; and Quality of Life. Each section has a community workgroup actively meeting to accomplish the community consensus goals. You will see the progress in each group, learn what is going on and even find ways to participate.

Prospective businesses and industries can be referred to the site to view the progress, to see proof that we are indeed a community in transition. And though we may not yet have attained our goals, they will be able to see what they are and that we are making progress. And for many, they may just choose us because they can see a place, a community where they can be involved and make a difference.

It is all about the future—ours. We absolutely must change the way we think—and keep changing with a focus on the end goal:

Self sustaining, transformational change which translates to a brighter future for us all.

Thank you.

There you will see the proof that our community and 20/20 are engaged and working on the holistic side of economic development. And when a business or industry looks at us, we may not have the statistics just yet to attract them—but we can prove the transition is in progress with the activities and progress noted on that website. After all, how do you eat an elephant? One bit at a time. If the entire community is nibbling away at it, we'll be in good shape in no time.