

Garfield County: Steady as she grows?

Panelists talk about coping with growth

BY LYNN BURTON

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Garfield County's population is expected to grow 30 percent in the next seven years, hitting 58,000 by 2010. To handle that growth, disparate groups must find common ground and work together.

"What we have to do is push these groups together," said John Parr, one of the keynote speakers at Friday's State of the Valley Symposium, organized by Healthy Mountain Communities.

The symposium, held at the Hotel Colorado, attracted more than 200 planners, government employees, elected officials and business owners.

Parr and Colorado Department of Local Affairs Demographer Jim Westkott held the audience's attention during the morning session.



Post Independent Photo/JIM NOELKER

From left, Martha Cochran, director of the Aspen Valley Land Trust; Basalt Town Council member Anne Freedman; and Susan Philp, Basalt town planner; listen to a speaker at the State of the Valley Symposium, held at the Hotel Colorado Friday afternoon.

Westkott explained why Garfield, Pitkin and Eagle counties are growing. He predicted Garfield County will continue growing at a steady rate, which he defined as 2 percent per year.

Westkott said the official state forecast that the county's population will hit 85,000 by 2025 is too low.

"I think the current population forecasts underestimate these growth pressures," Westkott said.

Colorado's population has grown three times faster than the rest of the United States since 1990, Westkott said.

Here's why Colorado is growing, Westkott said:

- The end of the Cold War in 1989.
- The growth in wealth in the United States and abroad.
- Growth of California high-tech industries.
- Globalization of capitalistic economies, and the ideal position of the United States

within that system.

- The region's geographic attractions, including mountains, rivers and open space.

In Colorado's rural resort regions, which include Garfield County, population growth was further spurred by people building second homes and retirees moving in.

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Front Range growth 'is coming your way'

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"The growth on the Front Range is coming your way," Westkott told the Western Slope audience.

The second home market is fueled in part by affluent baby boomers. Colorado is also catching up with and replacing other parts of the United States, such as the East Coast, that have attracted second home owners for decades.

Foreigners are also build-

"PARR'S PRINCIPALS" FOR REGIONAL COLLABORATION

- People act in their own self interests.
- You cannot understand others unless you know them and talk to them.
- People are not stupid.
- Regional collaboration is time-consuming work, but you have to do it.
- The beginning is the most important step.

Source: John Parr, director of the Alliance for Regional Stewardship in Denver.

ing second homes in Colorado, he said. "You are in an international market for recreational living," Westkott said.

Tourists, which Westkott included in the same sentences as retirees and second

home owners, are also a large factor in Western Slope growth.

Westkott said Garfield County is going to grow anyway, and it need not "desperately recruit" new business to stimulate the local economy.

"But you may have to recruit from a select group of anchor stores," he said of retail outlets.

Westkott also cautioned governments not to be pressured to solve the short-term problems of business.

John Parr, director of the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, was former Colorado Gov. Dick Lamm's campaign manager in 1974 and ran the campaign to keep the 1972 Winter Olympics out of Colorado.

In the early 1970s, he told the audience, people like him just thought they needed 51

percent of a voting bloc to get what they wanted. That polarized political approach left Lamm and his supporters short of their growth-control goals.

Today, Parr preaches an integrated regional approach that encourages dialogue between local governments, environmentalists and the business community.

"We must do a better job of pushing them together in the center, so their discussions don't take place in isolation," Parr said.

For example, if a town or county is interested in creating more affordable housing, it must involve the business community, which itself is interesting in housing for its employees.

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