



REACHING OUT - Lorna Williams explains some of the educational programs available at the AERO Institute, where she serves as director of operations. Williams was one of the speakers at the city of Palmdale's first Business Appreciation Breakfast, an effort to both thank and educate businesspeople in the Antelope Valley.

JIM SKEEN/Valley Press

Palmdale thanks businesses with breakfast

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By JIM SKEEN
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PALMDALE - The city held a breakfast Thursday to both thank its business community and to inform them of available programs that can provide a boost.

About 150 businesspeople gathered at the Larry Chimbole Cultural Center for a breakfast, to hear words of thanks, and to hear presentations on city programs, including tax credits offered through the enterprise zone, employment services offered by the South Valley WorkSource Center, and educational opportunities through the city-sponsored AERO Institute.

"We want to open eyes to the resources that are right here in Palmdale," Mayor Jim Ledford said. "There's probably people in business for years who didn't know this stuff."

Among the presentations was one on the enterprise zone, which offers such benefits as tax credits for sales and use taxes on machinery, tax credits for hiring employees who meet certain qualifications, interest deductions for lenders on loans to firms within an enterprise zone, and priority for various state programs, such as state contracts.

Speaking about the enterprise zone benefits was Jon Collard, president of American Tax Incentives, a consulting company that assists businesses in using zone benefits.

Collard noted that the benefits are not just for big businesses, saying in one case he was able to help a physician get \$17,500 in tax credits for one part-time employee.

Another presentation was on the services of the South Valley WorkSource Center, located at 1817 East Avenue Q, Suite A-12, that is intended to be a one-stop employment center, serving both job seekers and employers.

Services include no-cost job postings, customized recruiting and pre-screening of applicants.

The center's services are free. The center's operations are paid through federal grants distributed by Los Angeles County and the city of Palmdale, said Daniel Levitch, program manager for the South Valley WorkSource Center.

"We're prepaid, you might as well use us," Levitch said.

Another speaker was Lorna Williams, director of operations for the AERO Institute. AERO - short for Aerospace Education Research Operations - evolved out of concerns over the lack of engineering and technical training opportunities in the Antelope Valley.

The institute provides programs for "K to Gray" - meaning everything from programs to enhance K-12 education in math and science to post-graduate degrees to continuing education programs.

Since opening its doors in 2004, the NASA-backed institute has negotiated academic partnerships with California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; California Institute of Technology; Purdue University; Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University; the University of Southern California; Pepperdine University; and DeVry University.

The institute also houses a nanotechnology research laboratory, a project supporters said will bolster the region's aerospace industry and enhance educational opportunities in the Antelope Valley.

Nanotechnology is the development of circuits and devices from single atoms and molecules.

The technology could lead to creating devices such as sensors that are smaller and more efficiently packaged than today's sensors.

"There are so many people who leave our community for work and leave for school.

"What we are doing is finding opportunities right here," Williams said.

The event also include a brief presentation on crime prevention programs available for businesses, including education on spotting counterfeit money and bogus credit cards and what to do in case of a robbery.

"I thought it was great. There was a lot of great information," said Dion Foat, who owns Razzle Dazzle Vending.

"I didn't know about these programs."

City officials said they hope to make the breakfast an annual event.

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