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Expert: Area needs a new moniker

The name 'Quad Cities' just doesn't cut it, Portland consultant tells local leadership, adding the region is 'a well-kept secret'

By Joel Mills of the Tribune
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Lewiston, Clarkston, Moscow and Pullman have it all when it comes to the tools necessary to foster economic development.

But the so-called "Quad-Cities" have never done a good job of selling themselves to the rest of the world, according to one business consultant.

Part of the problem might be that generic name, Dave Leland told a meeting of regional education and government leaders at Lewis-Clark State College on Tuesday.

"In some respects, you're a well-kept secret," Leland, of the Portland, Ore.-based Leland Consulting Group, told the assembled leaders. "There are a lot of people who really don't know who you are and what you are."

Leland was invited to the meeting by Wanda Keefer, manager at the Port of Clarkston. Leland has been working with the port on marketing issues.

He noted the region has historically struggled with economic development, with 1 percent annual growth or worse.

One way to turn around stagnant growth is through better cooperative marketing, something the assembled group could foster, Leland said. That should start with the demise of the "Quad-Cities" moniker, which he called "pretty generic."

Some of the assembled leaders said they've struggled for years to craft a brand name that could encompass the whole region, but have come up empty because it is so diverse. Leland suggested that future meetings could be devoted toward finding a universal, overarching community identity that would appeal to people and economic interests looking to move into the area.

Duane Wollmuth, executive director of the Southeast Washington Economic

Development Association, said the region may be too economically and geographically disparate to force it all into one marketable lump. Instead, he suggested more collaboration on individual projects.

One example is what he and John Lane of the Clearwater Economic Development Agency called the "boat project." The project will use a \$50,000 grant and more than \$21,000 in matching funds from local agencies to develop international markets for boat manufacturers.

Leland said that another part of a new, unified marketing campaign should be what he called a "success audit" to compile each community's accomplishments.

"That becomes part of your marketing kit," he said. "That becomes part of your story."

And even though he said it often sounds like a cliché, Leland said the area's quality of life should be pressed hard when trying to attract economic development. He said his consulting group does a lot of polling and uses focus groups to inform its clients. And while things like containing sprawl and access to public transit always rate high, the most important issues are those that directly concern families.

"You have one of the safest communities in the country," Leland said, also noting its low cost of property and home-grown business tradition.

He said quality of life issues should be used to lure transplants from shrinking rust belt cities or hectic places like southern California.

But University of Idaho President Duane Nellis said the region needs to do a better job of keeping its own people from leaving in the first place. He said UI graduates would love to stay in the area if they just had resources like expanded business incubators and access to risk capital to get startups off the ground.

The group conducted its first meeting in December at Washington State University. The next meeting is scheduled for September.

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