

Tahoe-Reno struggling to find identity for sustainable future

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

It's the early 1930s.

At one West Coast university, an engineering professor laments about how many of his graduating students have to move East because of a lack of tech jobs in his area.

The area without enough tech jobs? Palo Alto.



Region trying to define what it is once visitors leave the Reno-Tahoe airport.

The professor? Stanford University's Frederick Terman.

"Terman had a real interest in what happened to the students produced here," said Henry Lowood, curator of the History of Science and Technology Collections at Stanford University. "He was seeing students like David Packard taking his degree and going to the East Coast to work for General Electric because there weren't enough jobs here in his field. So, the problem for him was figuring out how to seed something here so his own

students don't end up going somewhere else."

Less than a decade later, Terman convinces Packard to return to the area to form Hewlett-Packard with another fellow student, William Hewlett. By 1951, Terman's pet project Stanford Industrial Park opens, attracting tenants such as HP, Varian Associates, Eastman Kodak and Lockheed.

Today, the Palo Alto area is known as arguably the most storied place for tech in the world. Terman, meanwhile, is affectionately regarded as the "Father of Silicon Valley."

As Northern Nevada works to wean itself from a heavy diet of gaming and tourism, Silicon Valley's story shows how it's possible to create a thriving, new sector with enough vision, effort and just the right amount of luck.

The area is wrestling with many of the same challenges Terman tackled decades ago, but Northern Nevada also is dealing with a key wild card: one of the worst economic downturns in its history.

The recession still casts a large shadow over the area, and the challenge for Northern Nevada is to stay the course on economic development without losing sight of the big picture, said Richard Bartholet, research director for the Bureau of Economic Research at the University of Nevada, Reno.

"It's much more challenging to do growth and economic development while working out of a hole," Bartholet said. "We've got in excess of 14 percent unemployment and significant fiscal challenges at the state and local level. But while it would be nice to have some short-term ideas under way, it's also important for business, community and political leaders to not get so focused on short-term challenges – like filling this budget gap – that they lose sight of where we want to go and who we want to be in the long term."

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