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A Brooklyn Grows in San Diego?



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Deborah Szekely has seen a lot in her 94 years. She founded Rancho La Puerta spa in Tecate in 1940 and the Golden Door spa in San Marcos in 1958. She's been an

activist, a diplomat and a philanthropist who can take some degree of credit for helping rebuild The Old Globe theater.

She entertained the sold-out crowd recently at the South County Economic Development Council's 26th annual Economic Summit. Among her gems: she was openly accepted as an undocumented worker for many years in Mexico, and given the region's soaring housing prices and high retail rents, South County is poised to become the next Brooklyn.

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Szekely has a point about how the hip crowd tends to follow starving artists, who locally have been priced out of Little Italy, the East Village and soon Barrio Logan. But will hipsters migrate to Chula Vista or National City? They will if a few entrepreneurs put down stakes first.

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Erik Bruvold, president of National University System's Institute for Policy Research, reminded everyone that CEOs tend to locate company headquarters within 10 miles of where they live. That's a challenge for South County. But between Millenia's proposed 2 million square feet of Class A office space and the Brown Field master plan, there is plenty of room for fast-growing companies in South County. What it might take for Lee Chesnut or another developer to attract an anchor employer to drop in is a tougher proposition. (See Page 1 for our story on that topic.)

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An even more ambitious vision for South County includes a binational university. Chesnut's plans for Millenia include two four-story buildings that could house educational companies or institutions. But as Assemblywoman **Lorena Gonzalez** pointed out, the state is not in a position to provide any funding for that anytime soon.

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In his presentation, SANDAG chief economist **Ray Major** pointed out that in San Diego County from 2010-2015, wage growth has largely been limited to new jobs in manufacturing and the innovation economy while most sectors posted little or no gains in buying power. Average wages in the health care declined as job creation in the sector was dominated by home health care. It is indeed a vanishing middle class, which is a concern for South County's otherwise bright future.

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