

Tucson Citizen

Independent thinkers may bring some fresh ideas to Town Hall

by Teya Vitu on May 05, 2007, under Local, Special



Scouring the roster of Tucson Regional Town Hall participants, a few independent thinkers emerge who largely function outside the established mover-and-shaker network.

Town Hall organizers assembled a field of 159 delegates laden with the predictable names from the government and business sectors, largely the people behind Tucson's reputation for stalled civic improvement. The event fills Loews Ventana Canyon Resort from Sunday to Wednesday.

But Ethan Orr, Laura Kelly Mance, Mac Hudson and Kathleen Perkins have a shared uncommon trait that transcends the settle-for-something-simple mentality in Tucson: imagination and a vivid appetite to accomplish something significant.

Orr, 33, is executive director of Linkages, a nonprofit that finds jobs for people with disabilities who want to work. Linkages has found jobs for more than 1,500 disabled, but Orr will focus on an entirely different subject at the Town Hall.

"I think the biggest thing is to have a frank engagement on water issues," Orr said. "If we can establish a dialogue among the City Council, the Board of Supervisors, county wastewater management and Tucson Water, I think we would have done a great thing. It's the most looming issue we have.

"Of all the issues that could come out of this, this could have the most traction."

Water will be discussed Monday afternoon, as will land-use planning and transportation. The Town Hall will also tackle regional vision, downtown, work-force development, health care, research and development, education and literacy, and arts, culture and recreation.

Research and development hits home for Perkins, 47, a daily reader of the New

York Times and chief executive at Breault Research Organization, an optics software company. Her top two Town Hall priorities revolve around finding a way to keep young scientists from leaving Tucson.

“Number one would be my firm belief that young people need to be involved in the process,” Perkins said. “Number two would be what it takes to value the scientists, the backbone of your high-tech economy.”

Perkins, a no-nonsense executive, appreciates the Town Hall’s targeted format and that it will produce “marching orders.”

“Perhaps we have to break some cycles,” Perkins said. “There probably is some level of skepticism of what we might accomplish. The key is, is (the final report) visible and understandable.”

Mance, 52, may be regional vice president at Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, but she steers clear of the mover-and-shaker crowd and says, “I don’t even know who they are.”

“We need to level the playing field,” Mance said. “The people who have influence in the community need to look at the people who don’t and collaborate with them. It can’t be the same leaders. They need to cross-pollinate.”

Mance plans to bring rational thinking to the Town Hall.

“One thing I do is I drive things down the road,” she said. “I have to envision the solution and other impacts it has down the road. You might solve a problem here, but it may cause another problem down the road. I do that with everything. I drive everybody crazy with that.”

Hudson, 40, is president of the Menlo Park Neighborhood Association, which fights fiercely to make sure the Rio Nuevo housing and museum projects south of Congress Street benefit the West Side neighborhood.

“When we grow, we need to grow smart,” said Hudson, who teaches creative writing in the state prison system. “We need to grow in a way that everybody can benefit. Everybody’s voices need to be taken into account.”

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