

TEYA VITU
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The new kid is in town, and he drew quite a crowd for his first lunch engagement.

Joe Snell, chief executive of Tucson's newest economic development entity, drew a capacity crowd at Tuesday's Metropolitan Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau lunch. About 120 people attended a lunch that usually draws 70 to 80.

Snell, barely into his second day on the job, left most of the talking about Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities Inc. to Steve Lynn, who headed up establishing the entity that gives economic development for the Tucson area a single voice. But Snell did thank Tucsonans for their warm welcome.

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Snell, 41, is charged with stimulating high-paying job creation, whether by recruiting high-tech companies or, as he stresses, paying attention to concerns of existing companies.

"We have to make sure we don't ignore them and ask them if there are any barriers," he said.

Linda Herrick, marketing director at the Redemption Renewal Center at Picture Rocks, is familiar with bringing city, county, education and private sector economic development efforts together from her days in Indiana.

"I've always been in favor of this concept," Herrick said. "I hope to see some fruits from it."

Jim Hook, owner of the Adobe Rose Inn, also favor the regional approach to economic development.

"I'm excited about it," Hook said. "I'm very interested to see what they can do to bring all the parties together."

Snell, in an interview, said Tucson has a wealth of resources with which to build a vibrant economy to lift the region from its low-pay reputation.

"I think all the ingredients are here," Snell said. "I think there is a lot happening but we have to get some sizzle to it."

In his first weeks on the job, Snell will size up Tucson's strengths and weaknesses, and which gaps TREO can fill in the local economy. He believes in a rifle, rather than shotgun, approach: Focus on a specific target and not go after everything.

"We need to define where we are and where do we want to go," he said. "I think a lot of communities make the mistake and react (to things, like going after companies desperate to leave California)."

Snell is in the process of moving from Denver to Tucson with his wife and three children.