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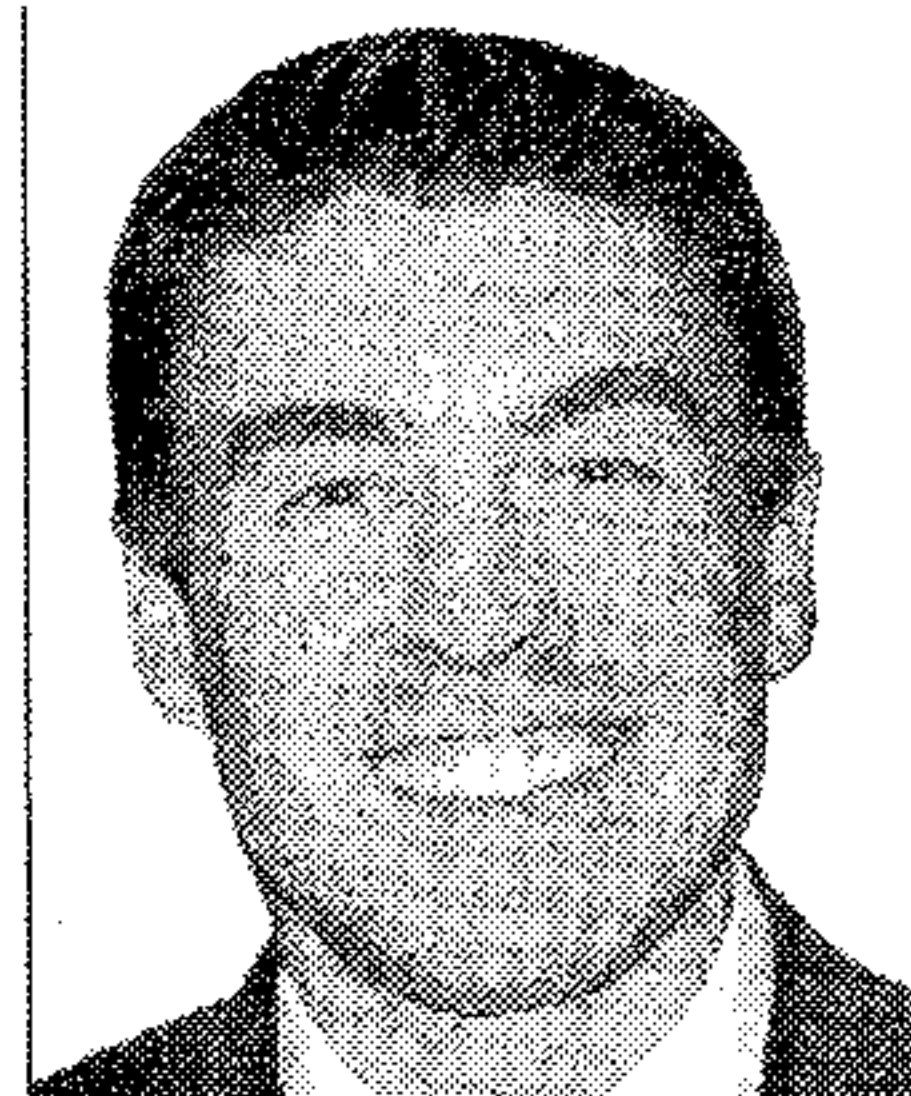
IdaVation inspiring Idaho innovations

“Drop the Silicon Valley envy,” advises Brad Feld, a rock star venture capitalist and triumphant entrepreneur from Boulder, Colo. Feld was featured as the keynote speaker at IdaVation, the annual education and networking summit presented by Kickstand. “Be the best that Boise [Idaho] can be,” he continued while encouraging Idaho entrepreneurs and innovators to focus on things they can control and to get out there and innovate.

As chair of IdaVation in 2009 and a current board member for Kickstand, I was pleased with the large turnout, positive energy and continued momentum created at our event on May 28. IdaVation delivered as promised, and the 200-plus event attendees, followers on Twitter and those watching the live video stream left more informed, better connected and energized to take on new challenges. It was hard not to be thrilled after Idaho congressman Walt Minnick opened the event by saying, “IdaVation is the single most important business event happening in Idaho this year.”

Why, you might ask, does it matter what a VC from Colorado and a congressman from Idaho’s First Congressional District have to say about entrepreneurship and innovation in our state? They are part of the “been there, done that” group of entrepreneurial business people who are leading at a higher level and attempting to infect others with a contagious entrepreneurial spirit.

Feld, Minnick and noted author Bill Wilmot delivered messages on innovation at the summit. They joined forces



GUEST OPINION

BEN QUINTANA

with eight Idaho-based entrepreneurs who shared their successes and failures during the panel discussions featuring entrepreneurs and innovators of startups and established companies. Each, in his or her own way, is defying odds and boldly driving forward despite tough economic conditions.

Economic downturns, like the one we are currently experiencing, create new opportunities and cause entrepreneurs to emerge. These go-getters see potential, capitalize on bleeding-edge technologies, and develop new markets. Mark Solon, managing partner of Highway 12 Ventures and IdaVation Steering Committee member added, “IdaVation demonstrated that there’s a thirst among this community to look beyond the current challenges and lay a foundation for smart, new economic growth.”

As a proactive approach to economic development, regional efforts put forth through marketing initiatives such as the Boise Valley Economic Partnership (BVEP) to attract and retain businesses in the valley are important and serve a much-needed purpose. To be successful as a valley and a state, however, I firmly

believe adding and keeping quality, high-paying jobs through attraction and retention efforts must also be complemented by new economic growth and job creation from entrepreneurial activity.

Now that IdaVation has concluded, what’s next on the horizon for entrepreneurs and innovators in Idaho? “We need to work on developing and implementing a truly integrated economic development strategy for the state where innovation plays a leading role,” says Chris Volk, president and chairman of the board for Kickstand. Supporting and inspiring innovation cannot be successful as a once-each-year strategy.

Besides the ongoing monthly meetings throughout the state, this fall Kickstand will partner with Stoel Rives to present the Idaho Innovation Awards recognizing innovative leaders and products contributing to Idaho’s economy.

Indeed, Idaho has a strong tradition of innovation and a rich history of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs and innovators are on a mission to make things happen in Idaho. From disruptive new market ideas and technologies to the smartest “geeked-out” dreams imaginable, great things are happening in our own backyard.

I wish I could glimpse into the future to see the progress of companies like pSiFlow, Auction Frogs, WhiteCloud Analytics, Metageek, BookLamp, Cradlepoint Technology and other companies in attendance at IdaVation.

See **QUINTANA**, page 6A

Legislative lobbying affected by e-mail, Twitter, other tech tools

AHRENS, from page 4A

themselves to mass, tightly organized lobbying campaigns that can give the often misleading appearance to legislators of one-sided support (or opposition) on an issue. Roden and Pisca decry that as “scoreboard politics,” where legislators simply count up the “yes” and “no” votes and vote accordingly.

An electronically organized mass campaign can be a virtual “bullying” tactic. The challenge will be for legislators to learn how to react appropriately to those tools – how to gauge what all the contacts really mean, and judge what weight to give the contacts vs. their own personal knowledge and experience on issues. Legislators will have to develop the courage and wisdom to make their own decisions – even

when e-mails and electronic contacts are one-sided.

No doubt about it, we’re seeing a tectonic shift in the lobbying landscape. Geddes, Roden and Pisca all would agree the essential elements of lobbying remain intact – personal credibility, providing accurate information, working relationships based on the time-honored “your word is your bond” principle.

But the new electronic tools that have accelerated the process so dramatically are now embedded in our system. They offer unprecedented opportunities for both lobbyists and constituents in contacting (lobbying!) legislators on the issues that are important to all of us.

Steve Ahrens is the retired president of the Idaho Association of Commerce & Industry and a former political editor of *The Idaho Statesman*.

IdaVation event encouraged state’s entrepreneurs of present and future

QUINTANA, from page 4A

Furthermore, I’m excited for those great companies that currently exist only as a seed planted in the brilliant minds of Idaho’s next great entrepreneurs. What new products, technologies, ideas and companies will emerge from the hard-working talented entrepreneurs and innovators in Idaho? Stay tuned.

Until then, Kickstand, and other entrepreneurial support organizations, will continue to scratch and claw their way forward and continually strive to help entrepreneurs and inno-

vators across Idaho network, learn and grow.

Join us on our quest to create not the next Silicon Valley, but to be a part of and create the best entrepreneurial ecosystem unique to the Boise Valley and Idaho.

Ben Quintana is the chair of IdaVation 2009 and sits on the board of directors for Kickstand, a state-wide support organization for entrepreneurs and innovators. He also works for the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce as director of business development for the Boise Valley Economic Partnership and is the founder and manager of the Boise Young Professionals program.