



## University of Nevada Cooperative Extension

**Fact Sheet 06-18**

# **An Assessment of Headline Issues in Pershing County**

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The purpose of this fact sheet was to provide qualitative information on community issues that were identified from the weekly Lovelock Review-Miner newspaper during 2005. Community issues in this fact sheet were defined as those issues of broad but significant importance to the community.

Since 2001 at least seven community assessments have been conducted in Lovelock and Pershing County. These include a youth assessment conducted in 2002, the Dean of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE) held a focus group session covering all Extension related disciplines in 2002, and an agricultural survey was completed in 2006 as part of the state-wide effort to identify agricultural issues. In addition, Frontier Coalition and the county school system have also conducted youth assessments. Economic and community development issues have been surveyed by the Chamber of Commerce, Nevada Small Business Development, and currently by NorthernNVision (Northern Nevada Development). In communication with the Chamber of Commerce (Hertz, 2006), it was mentioned that community participation appeared to be declining, apparently due to the plethora of assessments, focus groups meetings, and surveys being conducted. Therefore, in order to still collect information it was decided to take a different approach to identify community issues.

Pershing County is located in northwestern Nevada approximately 55 miles east of the Fernley – Reno financial and economic development sphere. Physically, it includes 6,031 square miles or 3,859,840 acres and has a population of 6,967 (Breazeale, 2005). Although the principal economic activities in the county are mining and agriculture, the community does have an industrial park and is actively seeking outside business investors and private entrepreneurs (Munk, 2006).

### **Methodology**

The Lovelock Review-Miner is the weekly local newspaper. It covers primarily the Lovelock area but also includes the community of Imlay and the Grass Valley area of northeastern Pershing County, which is located just south of Winnemucca. The assessment involved identifying community issues written about during each week of 2005. A similar pilot study was conducted in Lyon County in 2002 (Singletary, 2002). The Lyon County study concentrated on “public issues” rather than “community issues” but set the stage for other counties to also review their popular press as a method of identifying issues. The validity and reliability of the Lyon County study was reviewed and approved by a four-member panel of UNCE professional educators and area specialists. Therefore, the Pershing County study carefully followed the same methodology

of the Lyon County study in order to maintain an appropriate level of validity and reliability.

To assess community issues, weekly articles were catalogued in terms of headline stories that are normally found on the front page. Although, due to the layout of the Lovelock Review-Miner, some stories were also identified on other pages. The stories were then measured by column inch to determine their significance and they were categorized by subject. The subject areas were determined and categorized by three people after reading the articles and included; (1) economic development (ED), (2) community development / tourism (CDT), (3) rural health (RH), (4) county and city management (CCM), and (5) agricultural and natural resources (AGNR). The size of the article was the determining factor of its importance. Articles compete for advertising space, and therefore, the larger articles were considered to be of more importance to the newspaper and the community. A spreadsheet was created that listed the headline, a brief overview, the category, and column inches. A total of 140 articles met the criteria for the study.

Story size was used to break the article into three categories of importance. These were "moderately important issues" (1 – 25 column inches), "important issues" (26 – 50 column inches), and "very important issues" (51 column inches or greater).

### **Community Issues "Very Important" to Pershing County**

There were 13 articles that fell within the parameters of "very important" issues, which meant they had 50 column inches or more of space in one of the weekly issues of the Lovelock Review-Miner. These 13 stories included five from the county and city management category, three each from the rural health and community development / tourism categories and one each from economic development and agricultural and natural resource issues. The top ten stories from this category are included below and list the title, the number of column inches, date, and subject abbreviation.

- **PGH (Pershing General Hospital) asks for help from city, county: Department of Taxation gives ultimatum and hospital retirement payments are behind.** (89 ci, 5-26-05, CCM)<sup>1</sup>
- **Record numbers of participants attend annual Burning Man festival** (68 ci., 9-8-05, CDT)
- **Guide printing costs OK'd by board** (66 ci., 4-7-05, CDT)
- **Members present views on board consolidation** (58 ci., 4-21-05, CCM)
- **Merger still undecided** (58 ci., 4-28-05, CCM)
- **No decision made on proposed merging of boards** (58 ci., 5-12-05, CCM)
- **BLM will not continue paying for law enforcement for Burning Man** (57 ci., 7-14-05, CCM)
- **Fire restrictions for Northern, Central Nevada** (56 ci., 7-21-05, AGNR)
- **Merger of positions considered** (55 ci., 3-10-05, CCM)
- **Vaccines important in prevention of disease** (54 ci., 8-18-05, RH)

### **Community Issues "Important" to Pershing County**

The "important" category (25 – 50 column inches) has a total of 46 articles. This total includes 11 from the economic development category, 10 from rural health, nine from community development / tourism, and eight each from county and city management and agricultural and natural resources. The top ten stories from the "important" category are included below and once again show the title, the number of column inches, date, and subject abbreviation.

<sup>1</sup> ci = column inches; date and category of article

- **Domestic violence intervention soup and salad dinner raised funds to provide relief to victims** (48 ci., 10-27-05, RH)

- **Colored Cowhorse Ranch: Breeding, training, disaster relief** (48 ci., 11-3-05, ED)
- **Nevada garners award for China tourism efforts** (47 ci., 11-10-05, CDT)
- **Grant funds used to purchase van for seniors** (47 ci., 1-6-05, RH)
- **Club provides children with healthy alternatives** (43 ci., 1-6-05, RH)
- **Methamphetamine big problem in rural areas** (41 ci., 9-25-05, RH)
- **Standby rates disputed** (41 ci., 1-13-05, CDT)
- **Property tax abatement law passed: Verification cards distributed to property owners** (41 ci., 6-9-05, CDT)
- **Locally grown alfalfa places second at state fair** (38 ci., 9-15-05, AGNR)
- **Authorities: Methamphetamine is quickly becoming drug of choice** (40 ci., 9-22-05, RH)

### **Community Issues “Moderately Important” to Pershing County**

The “moderately important” category (25 column inches or less) had a total of 81 articles. This total included 20 from the economic development category, 19 from community development / tourism, and 14 each from agricultural and natural resources, county and city management and rural health. The top ten stories from the “moderately important” category are included below and again provide the title, the number of column inches, date, and subject abbreviation.

- **Unemployment is low here** (25 ci., 1-27-05, ED)
- **Global West Industries to expand** (24 ci., 6-23-05, ED)
- **Eagle Picher to expand export market** (24 ci., 3-31-05, ED)
- **No West Nile in Pershing County** (24 ci., 8-11-05, RH)
- **Imlay may receive new water system** (24 ci., 11-23-05, CDT)
- **Request to change land use denied** (24 ci., 12-15-05, CCM)
- **No decision made on recreation guide** (23 ci., 3-3-05, CDT)

- **Court encourages life-style change** (22 ci., 5-19-05, RH)
- **Perkins: Nevada needs to improve school system** (22 ci., 9-15-05, CCM)
- **PGH (Pershing General Hospital) goes high tech** (22 ci., 12-8-05, RH)

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This fact sheet reports the results of a needs assessment that tracked headline articles in the local Lovelock Review-Miner newspaper during 2005. It has been approximately four years since UNCE last conducted a broad-based assessment of community issues in Pershing County. However, over this same time period, UNCE and several other agencies have been conducting needs or community assessments related to specific topics and the community was becoming complacent about responding to written surveys and attendance was shrinking when focus groups were scheduled. It was decided to take a different approach, so the author replicated a pilot study that was conducted in Lyon County in 2002. Headline articles on community issues of broad importance were tracked over a one-year period.

The resulting subject areas and the corresponding number of articles that were covered by the local press included economic development (32), community development / tourism (31), rural health (27), county and city management (27), and agricultural and natural resources (23). By subject area, economic development was listed once in the “very important” category, 11 times in the “important” category, and 20 times in the “moderately important” category. Community development / tourism was listed 3 times in the “very important” category, 9 times in the “important” and 19 times in the “moderately important” category. Rural health was listed as “very important” 3 times, “important” 10 times and “moderately important” 14 times. County and city management had 5 articles in the “very important”, 8 in the “important” and 14 in the “moderately important” categories respectively. Agriculture / natural resources was listed 1 time as “very important”, 8 times as “important”, and 14 times as “moderately important.”

## Implications

The author is not suggesting that any one of the identified topics is more important than the other; only that these five topic areas appear to represent headline issues within Pershing County in 2005. One of the limitations to this type of survey is that some topics may draw more attention or be more sensational than others but that the less sensational topics are not necessarily less important to the community. For example, in this assessment, agriculture received relatively fewer headlines than the other topics, but that does not imply that agriculture is unimportant to Pershing County.

Cooperative Extension, as part of the land grant system, is responsible for assisting rural communities (Astin and Astin, 2000). At the present time UNCE programming efforts in Pershing County are primarily dedicated to agriculture (AGNR); both economic and community development (ED and CDT), and rural health (RH). Therefore, it appears that current programming efforts are fairly representative of several of the subject areas that received coverage by the local press during 2005. However, a new topic, county and city management (CCM), also emerged as an important topic through this assessment.

## Recommendations

While this assessment does provide partial confirmation for current UNCE programming efforts, UNCE is not currently providing educational programming in the areas of county and city management (CCM) so there is a definite need for closer exploration into the topic to determine what role UNCE may play. Based upon the experience of other states, potential topics may include communications, problem solving, decision making, leadership, goal achievement, and developing networks. It is also recommended that a review be undertaken of other agency assessments to identify any gaps or duplication of efforts in order to bring greater efficiency to the educational efforts within Pershing County.

## References

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