

University of Redlands, Alliance to study downtown

BY CINDY WATSON
For the Record Gazette

A three-year partnership has begun between the University of Redlands and the Banning Cultural Alliance to improve downtown Banning.

Under the program, students at the university will work with officials on the Banning Revitalization Initiative, which has among its elements finding ways to make the downtown district more appealing to businesses.

The Alliance has formed a panel that includes the city's redevelopment manager, members of the city council who sit as the governing

board of the agency, the Chamber of Commerce, university students and business managers and representatives.

It is not uncommon to find the Banning Cultural Alliance partnering with other groups and organizations to promote the City of Banning's downtown area through events and activities.

However, now the Alliance has teamed up with students from the university and created a group being called the Banning Revitalization Initiative, or BRI.

"Over the past year we have worked with university

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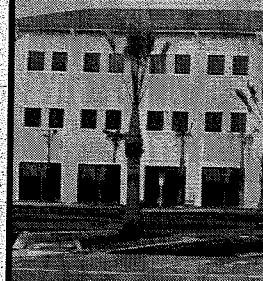
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YOUTH & EDUCATION

PANEL

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students but nothing on this level," said Carol Newkirk, executive director of the Alliance. "We have been able to put this fantastic energy and knowledge together for Banning."

Newkirk credited Mara Winick, a professor at the University of Redlands, for taking the time to help bring the program to fruition. "Prior to this, working with the students was primarily internships and work study

students," she said.

The students who are working on the project include Dennis Partain II, acting as student team leader and liaison for the project; Sandy Rubio and Shannon Call, working specifically on the Cultural Arts District; Thomas Mouwen and Thomas Martin, focusing on Economic Development; and Steven Bickers and Peter Sherman who are working on marketing initiatives.

The students are majoring in various fields at the University of Redlands, from business to political science.

The students work independently on their parts of the overall project and meet with Newkirk twice per month to discuss their progress. After meeting with Newkirk, the students meet with the entire BRI panel once a month to present their findings and to share ideas and information.

While the project will focus on other development aspects over the next three years, the current focus of the BRI panel is to work on the city's economic development effort to find ways of making the downtown area

more appealing to both existing and new businesses.

"Our goal is to create a panel and lay the foundation for the future students who will come after us," Partain, the student liaison, recently told the panel. "This panel is dedicated to three main goals for downtown Banning: economic development, a designation and cultivation of a cultural district, and a marketing and research campaign. Through these goals we hope to bring more people and business downtown," said Partain.

Officials who make up the BRI "community panel" include John Janson, city redevelopment manager; Councilman Don Robinson, chairman of the Redevelopment Agency; Councilwoman Barbara Hanna; Mayor Bob Botts; Art Welch of the Banning Chamber of Commerce; Linda Hanley of Bank of Hemet; Valerie Monroe, State Farm broker; Don Smith, Haskell Realty; Mike Bennett, general manager of Sun Lakes Country Club and Alliance members Newkirk, Karen Clavelot, president, Beverly Rashidd, board member, and Clidine Roper, man-

ager of the BCA gallery. (Only two city council members at a time plan to attend meetings.)

At a Nov. 17 meeting of the students and officials, Janson told students that he was "looking forward to the fresh ideas."

"I am very excited about having you here," said Welch, thanking the students for their participation.

As part of their research, the students conducted a survey during the recent Phineas Festival and asked eventgoers their perceptions of downtown.

The survey was designed to learn what brings people downtown now and what would bring them downtown more often.

The students are currently working on a survey to gather information from downtown businesses.

Another idea the group might research is possibly expanding the Mural Councils Art Banner program to include banners with information on them and not just art.

"It is very nice to see the art," said student Shannon (continued on page 22)

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COOKING

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include catering; dietician work; lab chef, who does food testing; food purchasing; and

it."

Shay, Arnold said, is a bit more laid back, "she has the passion and the heart. They're both going to do very well."

And, of course, when you

PANEL

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Call, who is working on the

Cultural Arts District. "But where can I go now?"

She was referring to people who might be walking or driving in downtown who

might be seeking additional places in the city to visit or see art.

"I have seen this work in several communities: Banners with identifications and directions, providing a route for your downtown," responded Welch.

Another suggestions included speaking with the owners of empty building and putting showcases in their windows, from artisan displays to youth art. This effort is already underway.

Cindy Watson is affiliated with the Banning Cultural Alliance.

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