

Prosper Lincoln Gives Progress Report -- Lincoln has Two Sides

2017, August 23, By Nancy Hicks Lincoln Journal Star

Prosper Lincoln volunteers provided a progress report and a pep talk on the effort to make Lincoln a better city at a breakfast attended by more than 800 community leaders Wednesday.

Prosper Lincoln is a project based on 10 years of data, and the data tells a story of two Lincolns, said Nancy Shank, with the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center.

One Lincoln is prospering and has rebounded well from the recession, and another is struggling to an even greater extent, she said at a breakfast meeting at Pinnacle Bank Arena.

The 10 years of data includes the Great Recession, when half of all Americans lost a job or saw a cut in pay or in hours, said Shank, who developed Lincoln Vital Signs, a data-driven report that led to the communitywide Prosper Lincoln project.

Lincoln is experiencing recovery from the recession. The average household has nearly recovered its prerecession work hours and income. The number of neighborhoods where more than 40 percent live in poverty has shrunk by one, from six to five. And nearly 90 percent of all Lincoln residents have health insurance.

“Overall Lincoln is doing better than most cities in the United States,” Shank said.

But there is a worrying trend of increased disparity, where higher-income households experienced greater income gains than lower-income households. And the number of people working full time, but still living in poverty has doubled, she said.

In Lincoln, nearly 40,000 individuals -- 15 percent of the community -- live below the poverty threshold. And the number of children who participate in Lincoln Public Schools' free and reduced price lunch program has doubled to nearly half of the district population, she said.

Breakfast speakers, including Gov. Pete Ricketts and Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler, encouraged audience members to get or remain involved in the Prosper Lincoln effort, spearheaded by the Lincoln Community Foundation and almost two dozen businesses and community agencies.

Lincoln did not get to be a great city by accident,” Ricketts said. It happened “because people like you worked to make it a great city,” the governor said as he listed some of the city's top 10 accolades.

Government can do a lot of great things -- build roads, protect public safety, protect its most vulnerable people, Ricketts said. But love of community is what makes a great city, he said.

Beutler also thanked community leaders from the nonprofit, private business and government sectors for helping shape the city.

It is sometimes difficult to discern good change from bad change, particularly when the pace of change is so accelerated, so sophisticated and so complicated, he said.

It is paramount that groups of intelligent citizens help sort through that change, choosing good change and rejecting bad change, Beutler said.

Over the past three years Prosper Lincoln set out three priority areas: early childhood, employment skills and innovation and entrepreneurship.

And the core group has hired four professionals to guide the volunteer efforts: Michelle Suarez, childhood education; Bryan Seck and Mike Milbourn, employment; and Rich Claussen, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Prosper Lincoln is co-chaired by Rich Bailey, founder of Bailey Lauerman; JoAnn Martin, president/CEO of Ameritas; and Barbara Bartle, president of the Lincoln Community Foundation.