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Commerce, Conservation Session Called a 'Success'

By Joe Barker, Missourian Staff Writer

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Dan Burkhardt, founder of Magnificent Missouri and the Katy Land Trust, addresses the attendees at the Commerce and Conservation conference Wednesday, July 29, at Jesuit Hall in Downtown Washington. Burkhardt organized the event to help bridge commerce and conservation efforts. He said one of the goals was to get a variety of people in the same room to exchange ideas. Missourian Photo.

Dozens of people packed into Jesuit Hall in Downtown Washington Wednesday to take part in a one-day “think tank.”

The brainchild of organizer Dan Burkhardt, the Commerce and Conservation conference brought together people from different backgrounds to discuss the Missouri River Country.

“It was a success beyond what I expected,” Burkhardt said. “It exceeded my expectations and they were high. Everyone enjoyed the variety of subjects we covered and the speakers.”



In his opening remarks, Burkhardt said the event was designed to get different people in the same room to share ideas. The goal was to share ideas about how to find ways to boost both commerce and conservation along the Missouri River.

“I’d like all of us to think about this day as a one-day think tank,” he said. “What we’d like this day to be is catalyst for stimulating discussion and action — creating commerce through collaboration and conservation.”

Burkhardt, who lives in St. Louis but owns a farm in Marthasville, said he’s always held an interest in combining commerce and conservation. He founded the Katy Land Trust, Magnificent Missouri and is the co-author of the book “Missouri River Country,”

Burkhardt said the Missouri River area provides so much appeal that there’s no reason people from St. Louis shouldn’t be flocking to the area to visit.

Those visitors, he said, would help out local economies.

Opportunity

“I see it as an opportunity,” he said.

To help make this a possibility, the conference was created.

“Today we’d like to begin, and I emphasize begin, to discuss the things that are important to this region,” he said.

He compared the area favorably to both San Francisco and Miami Beach because of similar features like views, wineries and natural water resources.

At least 130 people attended from all along the Missouri River. In attendance were representative from Hermann, New Haven, Chamois, St. Charles, and Washington including Mayor Sandy Lucy.

They were joined by officials from the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Katy Land Trust, others and businesses along the river.

Lucy kicked off the conference by welcoming the crowd to the city. She said she was delighted the event came to Washington.

“The river is an important part of all our lives,” she said.

Following Lucy’s welcome, a video was shown featuring a message from former U.S. Sen. Christopher “Kit” Bond. Bond was invited to the event, but could not attend.

In the video, Bond spoke about how important the Missouri River area is to the state — not just for its “beautiful” scenario, but for the economic powers like wineries.

Many Speakers

The diverse group heard presentations from various speakers about a variety of topics. Steve Belko, director of the Missouri Humanities Council, kicked things off with a discussion of a proposed Missouri German Heritage corridor sandwiched between Highways 94 and 100.

Other presentations were about the Katy Trail and its economic impact, the agriculture of the area, the unique qualities of the Missouri River area and the economics of the area.

“I just started with a list of the features of the Missouri River valley that I thought were most valuable, and then I started looking around for people that I thought could talk about them,” Burkhardt said. “I wanted a whole spectrum of opinions and presenters so I just started calling people around six months ago.”

Burkhardt said he enjoyed the micro-presentations from the various speakers. Each presentation lasted about 20 minutes, preventing people from getting overwhelmed and bored, he said.

Burkhardt said in his opening remarks one of his goals for this event was to get people in a room with others who share the same ideas, but don't know each other. He said the conference accomplished that.

"We got to introduce people, for example from New Haven, that are really interested in seeing people better appreciate that area, to people in Augusta who are interested in the same thing," he said. "Even though they're just a few miles apart on the river, they had never met. We really were able to connect a lot of like-minded people that had never crossed paths before."

Burkhardt said he hopes the conference is not a one-time thing.

"We're hoping to continue this discussion," he said. "The idea, again, is that this would be a catalyst. . . . We want to get all these people that care about the same things in that 30- to 40-mile stretch to connect. I think with Mayor Lucy, the representatives from other towns, the foundation is there to really build something."