

Think tank at prosperity summit held at NTCC

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Barry Hamilton, at left, and Ty and Valerie Russell thumb through a book of old photos of Mount Pleasant from the 1920s and 1930s, Tuesday morning, showing the downtown square and the storefronts where they are standing.

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By MARCIA DAVIS Managing editor

Community leaders from a variety of occupational backgrounds pooled ideas Wednesday at the day-long 2015 Prosperity Summit hosted by Titus County and the National Association of Counties.

By invitation, some 36 representatives from the financial, government, academic, judicial, agricultural, tourism, business, economic development and social service realms attended the summit, which was held at the Northeast Texas Community College.

Dr. Deborah Markley, co-director of the **Center for Rural Entrepreneurship**, led the discussion Wednesday morning on identifying assets, investment opportunities and ownership.

Markley characterized this summit as unique, among the others she has led around the country.

“I think that we have more of the right people in this first Titus County meeting than we usually see,” she said. “The leadership team has done a great job of getting the right people together who care.”

The prosperity summits follow a Wealth Works model approach to economic development that connects a region’s assets to market demand in ways that build rooted wealth for local people, places and firms, according to NACo officials.

The summits are designed to bring together individuals from a broad range of public, private and non-profit sector partners who have self interest in the outcomes and an openness to discovering shared or common interest, according to the Wealth Works materials.

Markley said the goal of the summits is to advance a region's prosperity by building wealth that sticks, and by building bridges between community development and economic development.

"The hope is that there will be enough energy created that there will be more meetings," she said. "The hope is that they'll see the assets they have in the community - especially in the agricultural sector – in a new light and see how they could combine those in a much more profitable way."

During her talk to the group, Wednesday, she asked them to list area's strengths and weaknesses and exchange ideas.

She pointed out that there was "great social potential for labor and creativity," but that among the group Wednesday she did not see representation from the minority, disabled, and economically disadvantaged."

She said sometimes to draw the missing demographics of the community, the follow-up prosperity meetings might need to be at a church – to draw the faith-based community, or at a community pavilion to draw minorities and others.

"Where you have the table determines who comes to the table," she said.

She told the group that she hoped at the end of the day they would walk away with plans and ideas for their next steps and that they would continue the discussions in other meetings in their own groups and sub-groups.