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Opinion

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Sustainability, growth can coexist

Sustainability isn't just a buzzword; it's a movement that presents a driving opportunity for our financial solvency. The word by definition considers a balance between the economy, environment and society to ensure that the needs of future generations are met and their quality of life is the same, if not better.

In today's economy, we're all becoming more cognizant of the amount of gas we consume, energy we use and material goods we purchase. In fact, more than three in five Valley



**DIANE
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MY TURN

residents, or 63 percent, say economic challenges have caused them to change some of their habits to conserve energy and save money, according to a Valley Forward Association survey conducted by WestGroup Research on sustainability practices.

Most residents who made changes said their efforts were focused on reducing usage of electricity — adjust the thermostat (27 percent), turn off lights (27 percent), change electric plan (17 percent), switch to compact florescent bulbs (14 percent) and more closely monitor electricity usage in general (12 percent). To this I say we're already headed a step in the right direction in our everyday personal lives — bravo!



CARL DUROCHER/PHOTOS.COM

The Valley is turning to energy-efficient bulbs, a survey says.

Too bad it took an economic crisis to get there, though. But what about business and industry? How do we force a paradigm shift in the corporate world to improve both the environment and the bottom line on profitability?

Now celebrating its 40th year of operation, Valley Forward's 2009 theme is Healthy Environment, Healthy Economy. Our non-profit, business-based environmental group will host a half-day forum on the correlation between economic growth and sustainability on Thursday at the Wyndham Phoenix Hotel to bring answers and action to the forefront. In particular, the summit will bring two panels of experts together to engage participants in conversations on "Becoming the Solar Capital of the World" and "Sustainable

Capitalism: Growing Healthy, Livable Communities."

These topics are fresh in our minds today as we continue to find means to capitalize on strong economic platforms in our local industries. According to President Barack Obama's stimulus bill, one-tenth of the funding will be allocated to environmental projects. With 300 days of sunshine, Arizona is naturally a front-runner for capitalizing on this revenue stream.

However, we need to think beyond solar and diversify our business interests to fully achieve sustainability — which ultimately provides us with staying power to lead the nation in balancing the environment, economy and societal needs.

For instance, there are sound economic and environmental reasons for encouraging high-performance green buildings and energy-efficient homes and offices. As a young urban center, our community is on the cusp of greatness. There is a unique opportunity to ensure the livability and sustainability of this place we call home. The environment and the economy — two interlaced issues coming together as one — vastly impact our delicately balanced future.

Diane Brossart is president of Valley Forward Association, which brings business and civic leaders together to convene public dialogue to improve the environment and livability of Valley communities.