New Web site mirrors local trends

By Rick Steigmeyer, staff writer, The Wenatchee World
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WENATCHEE — A new Web site promises to provide community organizations and individuals with easy-to-understand, one-stop information about local trends and statistics.

The Web site offers easy access and comparisons to must-have information for nonprofit groups, schools and public agencies seeking data for grant submissions. But it’s also a tool that can be used by any citizen or business to make important decisions, proponents said at a launch event Thursday afternoon at the Performing Arts Center of Wenatchee.

More than 200 people attended a program and reception to launch the Chelan-Douglas Trends Network. Most had been involved in helping develop the site over the past year.

The Web site — now operational at www.chelandouglastrends.org — offers statistical information in the form of graphs and analysis about the region’s economy, environment, health-care systems, education, housing, transportation and public safety.

“This will make life easier for nonprofit organizations,” said Beth Stipe, executive director of the Community Foundation of North Central Washington. She said it will take longer for individuals to learn how to use the site to their advantage. “We want to get the information out. We’ll be going to every knife-and-fork club in town.”

“We’re data hounds,” said Allison Williams, Wenatchee executive services director. “All the good things the city has done, we’ve had to come up with the data first to get the funding.” Williams said many people aren’t aware that more than half of the students in Wenatchee schools are eligible for free or reduced cost lunches under federal programs. The information is on the Web site and is an indicator of the area’s poverty. “This offers a dose of reality.”

“It’s always on, always current,” said Patrick Jones, director of Eastern Washington University’s Institute of Public Policy & Economic Anlaysis. EWU staff and students pulled the information together from publicly available data and host the site from its campus in Cheney. EWU also developed similar sites for Spokane and Walla Walla. Much of the data is directly compared to state and national data in a way that makes it easy to see regional trends, he said.

The network follows the lead of a similar Web site that tracks trends in Spartanburg — a city of 271,000 residents — in northern South Carolina. Spartanburg’s county community foundation started gathering information in 1989 that showed the area’s quality of life, said Mary Thomas, Spartanburg Community Foundation executive vice president. Thomas was guest speaker at Thursday’s event. The study came up with some strong points and also some depressing statistics about Spartanburg’s low income, high illiteracy and high teen pregnancy rates.

“We got our community groups together to produce a book of information,” she said. “But soon we found that we wanted to do more than produce a pretty book. We wanted action. We found that until we involved the people impacted we were just talking to ourselves.” The community network that
evolved with years of work has since helped transform the community into one of the nation’s most vibrant cities, she said.

“Burdens are not heavy when everyone lifts,” she said. “People have to learn to work together.”

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