

## Billion-Dollar Boom

Elko prospers as region's retail hub

By: Marianne Kobak  
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Elko – Elko's economic future looks bright, according to the latest Buxton retail site assessment – about \$1 billion worth of bright.

“The word is out there that Elko is booming, said Elaine Barkdull Spencer, Elko County Economic Diversification Authority executive director.

Barkdull Spencer said Elko isn't just a small town. It is a micropolis because the trade area expands outward – about 200 miles – to places such as Wells, Winnemucca, McGill, Ely and Battle Mountain.

She said the Buxton group conducted surveys and found people from Winnemucca travel to Elko to shop.

Elko has a retail potential of \$1.38 billion, according to the report.

“I had to hand it off to someone else to make sure I was reading that right,” Barkdull Spencer said.

She also said the study examined what types of shoppers are in Elko's micropolitan area. The largest group, at 19 percent, is labeled “big sky families” and the second largest group, at 12 percent, is “fast track families.”

Buxton did a good job of identifying the Elko area shopper, Barkdull Spencer said.

Big sky families are scattered in placid towns and are a segment of young rural families that have turned high school educations and blue-collar jobs into busy, middle-class lifestyles, according to the study. They like to play baseball, basketball and volleyball in addition to fishing, hunting and riding horses. They

also buy virtually every piece of sporting equipment on the market.

Fast track families have upper middle-class incomes, several children and spacious homes. They are in their prime acquisition years and are middle-aged parents with disposable income and an educated sensibility to want the best for their children, according to the study. They buy the latest technology and take advantage of their rustic locales by camping, boating and fishing.

Barkdull Spencer said retailers look at Elko because the people in this area buy and number more than 84,000.

The average income in the region also increased since Buxton did its first report in 2004. That year, the average income was \$54,831 and in 2006; the average income is \$59,968.

Elko Mayor Mike Franzoia said he was pleased with the report.

“It's good because the new numbers show economic growth,” he said. “Numbers by a third party are always good because they're not arbitrary.

He said Kmart still being here and no grocery stores closing after Super Wal-Mart has been here a year are good signs for Elko's economy.