Imperial Valley environmental health summit looks to cultivate leaders

By JULIO MORALES, Staff Writer and Copy Editor

IMPERIAL — The Salton Sea and local air quality loomed large at the fifth annual Imperial Valley Environmental Health Leadership Summit. Just as evident was a dedicated effort by a variety of stakeholders to meet the environmental health challenges posed by the sea and impacted air quality.

Yet, much needs to be done, particularly at the local level, organizers said.

"We need leadership, policy and advocacy to come from here," said Luis Olmedo, director of Comite Civico del Valle, Inc., which hosted the summit.

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Pointing to recent state legislation that focuses on improving the health of the New River and the Salton Sea, Pérez noted the importance of grassroots efforts in advancing reform. To be effective, grassroots advocacy and public policy need to work in tandem.

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"The secret to their success has been the use of promotores, or community outreach workers, Ayala said. To foster community change, one must tap into the energies of these natural-born leaders. Doing so helps marginalized groups rethink what it means to be a leader. Too often, communities of color tend to equate "leaders" with the same policy makers and authorities who have long neglected the needs of such
communities.

"We have to take ownership of that word," she said.

The slow realization that he was capable of enacting local change prompted Ivan Soto to give back to the community, even though he sometimes has his doubts.

"I sometimes wonder if I'm making a difference," Soto, who spoke during a workshop titled "Resisting Toxicity 101: Tools for Change," said.

For the past several years the 26-year-old has been involved in community service projects and has founded a local chapter of the 7 Day volunteer group. The idea came about after constantly having to listen to friends complain about the current state of affairs in the Valley.

Despite being busy with school, work and club activities, Soto remains committed to community service.

"It's overwhelming, but I know it's going to pay off eventually," he said.

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Computer-Generated Imagining (CGI) Has Been Around 20 Years. The day before I went to see "Mask" in 1994, I visited the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences Museum & Library in order to examine photos from the set of "The Winning of Barbara Worth" (1926). Today, we say, How do we get the public's attention surrounding the imminent demise of The Salton Sea? Easy. Make a movie that SHOWS what DID happen, What MIGHT happen and, What COULD happen (featuring all the appropriate plumbing connections needed, how we get there for under $2Billion). Someone offer me a residence, I'll promptly learn to speak Spanish & Undertake this Mission at once.

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