

Center for Business Research and Economic Development Regional Economic Outlook Meeting Opens To Public

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By Wanda Freeman

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A gathering that was once invitation-only will make its debut as a public event this week when the Center for Business Research and Economic Development hosts the Fort Smith Regional Economic Outlook Forum.

The forum is from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday in the Smith-Pendergraft Center at University of Arkansas at Fort Smith. Tickets are \$15 for the luncheon. To register, contact the Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce at 783-3111 or e-mail casey@fortsmithchamber.com. Kermit W. Kuehn, director of UAFS-based CBRED, will share the podium with Kathy Deck, director of the Center for Economic Research at UA Fayetteville.

“The forum will coincide with the release of the third-quarter Regional Economic Outlook Report,” Kuehn said, “so we’ll review what’s happening, what we know now, and the implications.”

Kuehn said he’ll also talk about consumer confidence, a major indicator in the report, and there should be time for questions at the end of the program.

Deck, who has given solo presentations at previous forums hosted by Arvest Bank, said she and Kuehn will “tag-team” their remarks. He will likely focus on the Fort Smith regional economy while she will give a broader perspective focusing on the national and statewide picture.

“When we look at where we are now — which is 18 months into the recovery, not in the recession — we’re on an upward swing,” Deck said, adding that Arkansas is coming out of the recession at the same time as the rest of the country even though it got into the recession a bit later and less deeply.

“I’ll also talk about policies of the federal government dealing with interest rates, deficits and the like,” Deck said.

Craig Rivaldo, president of Arvest Bank, said his bank has hosted the invitation-only forum for the past three years and decided to open

the event to the public in conjunction with Arvest's sponsorship of CBRED's quarterly regional report, announced in August.

"It's so good to partner with our local university on this. ... We wanted to evolve our meeting with customers and share it with the entire community," Rivaldo said.

As many as 100 people have attended the forums in the past, Rivaldo said, and Kuehn said he was expecting about 150 to attend Friday.

CBRED, an outreach program of UAFS that began in January, also publishes the Monthly Economic Indicators Index, published and co-sponsored by the Times Record.

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