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## **Tech design way to help Triad, panel says Developing creative thinking will help region recover from industrial losses, speakers say**

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It can be used to create medical devices, drugs and even special effects for movies. Its uses can range from video-game technology to modern-day architecture.

It's called design, and it represents a form of thinking that could pay dividends to the Triad, business leaders said this week.

Design, a way of using creative thinking to solve problems, could bring companies, jobs and tax revenue to Winston-Salem, a panel of business leaders and physicians said during the Science and Technology Speakers Series at the Piedmont Triad Research Park late Thursday.

Design is sometimes a nebulous word, and local business leaders have been struggling to come up with a definition.

"Clearly, we felt that design isn't well understood," said Russ Read, a co-chairman of the Technology Council of the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, the organization that is host for the series.

Finding employees and persuading established, old-world companies to change their businesses could be one of the biggest roadblocks to developing a creative community in the Triad, some of the panelists said. "You've got to, first of all, have an employer who encourages creative thinking and does not snuff out ideas quickly," said Richard Clabaugh, a cinematographer and faculty member at the N.C. School of the Arts' School of Filmmaking.

Clabaugh was one of four panelists who spoke on design and its uses in business. The other panelists included Randy Pool, the managing partner of Stantec Consulting Services Inc.; Alan Sterling, the president Design Factory International; and Jeffrey Shilt, an orthopedic surgeon for Wake Forest University Health Sciences. Pool and Sterling are based in Winston-Salem.

Design, once seen as a concrete industry, is better described as a way of thinking creatively, Clabaugh said. Through creative thinking, businesses can develop new technologies, pharmaceutical drugs and computer software programs, he said.

Design "is the creation of a new concept," he said. It's "making something from scratch."

AngelouEconomics, a Texas consulting firm, released a study in November saying that the Triad needed to focus on implementing design technology as a way to move out of the declining furniture, textiles and tobacco markets.

Design "is a process that combines creativity and innovation with physical sciences to create unique solutions," Pool said.

Stantec has used creative thinking to help design hospitals across the country, including in Los Angeles and Hawaii, Pool said.

Getting companies to think "outside the box" can sometimes be difficult, as more established businesses can sometimes be reluctant to adopt different principles about running a business, Sterling said.

"There is a culture shift that needs to occur," he said. "This is a real tough market for young people. The businesses that are within this area tend to network within themselves."

So how can the region better develop creative thinking? Businesses need to join with the educational community to attract younger people interested in creating technology, panelists said.

The N.C. School of the Arts is planning to have a digital-design arts program up and running by 2006, school officials have said. The program could bring a new breed of students into the business world, the panelists said.

"It starts with education," Clabaugh said.