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Valley & State
Page B2

Chicago mayor touts urban sustainability

By Casey Newton
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Great global cities of the future must make sustainability a top priority, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley told Phoenix residents on Tuesday as part of an Earth Day event.

PHOENIX "Cities are no longer enemies of the natural environment," Daley told about 200 people at a luncheon at the Phoenix Convention Center.

"They're leading the way in preserving and protecting it." The luncheon was part of Valley Forward's fifth-annual Livability Summit.

The summit included a series of speeches and discussions with the theme of "Healthy Living in the Desert."

Daley, who has served as Chicago's mayor for almost two decades, described a series of efforts the city has made in recent years to improve the environment in Chicago, its suburbs and beyond.

The efforts include rooftop gardens on high-rise buildings that lower temperatures in the summertime, allowing them to be cooled with less energy.

Daley has also championed the reclamation of city land to create more open space, as with Millennium Park along the shores of Lake Michigan.

Phoenix Councilman Greg Stanton was impressed with a Chicago program that turns school playgrounds into urban parks when not in use.

"Too often after the end of the school day, those things get

shut down when they could be urban parks in the heart of the city," said Stanton, who chairs the City Council's sustainability subcommittee.

"Cities need to reach out more to see if there are opportunities to open up public spaces to the larger community."

Mayor Phil Gordon, who introduced Daley, described Phoenix's own commitment to sustainable development.

Gordon said that one reason he has championed the redevelopment of downtown Phoenix is to offer a sustainable alternative to continued sprawl.

"The mayor and I have a lot of things in common," Gordon said of his Midwestern counterpart.

"The urban core is the key."