

2011

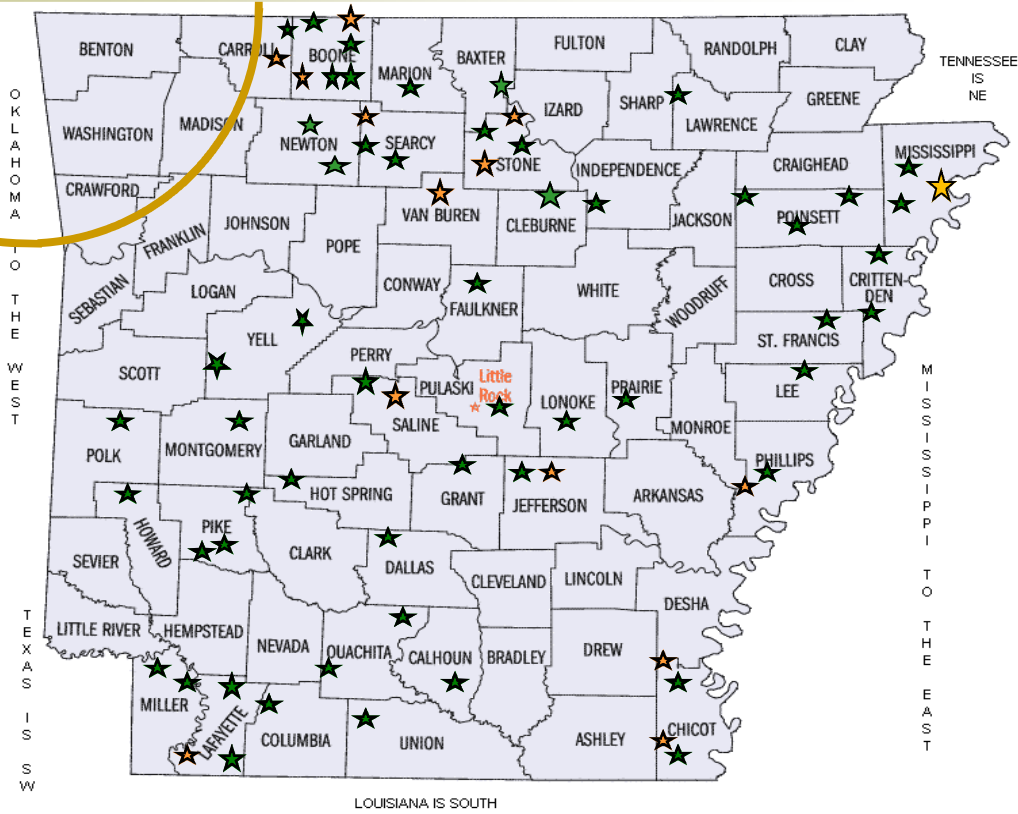
RURAL
**COMMUNITY
ALLIANCE**

Annual Progress Report

Helping rural schools and communities survive and thrive

www.thenewrural.org

Where we are



★ RCA Chapter

★ Youth Empowerment Network (YEN)

Acorn	Delight	Guy Perkins	Paron	Timbo
Alpena	Dermott	Hampton	Paron YEN	Turrell
Alpena YEN	Dermott YEN	Hughes	Plainview-Rover	Valley Springs
Alzheimer-Dollarway	Earle	Lead Hill	Poyen	Valley Springs YEN
Alzheimer-D'way YEN	East Poinsett County	Lead Hill YEN	Prairie County	Weiner
Bearden	Elaine	Leslie	Rivercrest	Lafayette County
Bismarck	Elaine YEN	Marianna	Rivercrest YEN	Mt. Judea
Bradley	Fouke	Marked Tree	Rural Special	Jasper
Bradley YEN	Eudora	Midland	Rural Special YEN	Concord-Ida
Bruno-Pyatt	Eudora YEN	Mineral Springs	Smackover	Norfork
Carlisle	Friends of RCA	Oden	Stephens-McNeill	Fouke
Carthage	Fourche Valley	Omaha	St. Joe	
Centerpoint	Genoa Central	Osceola	St. Joe YEN	



Mission

Rural Community Alliance is a state-wide organization of community-based chapters whose mission is to

1. Preserve and improve rural and community schools and, by improving opportunities, create a more prosperous future for students and communities.
2. Educate the public about the role and value of rural schools and communities and share their successes.
3. Organize community members to support and strengthen their schools and communities.



Vision

Members of Rural Community Alliance share a common vision for improving the communities of rural Arkansas, which includes

1. Excellent schools, which focus on the individual student and which are nurtured by close collaboration between school and community.
2. Strong communities, which through visioning, planning, and working together make the most of their resources in an environmentally and culturally responsible way, preserve their rural heritage, and offer the best possible lifestyle to their residents and future for their children.
3. Committed citizens, who band together across geographic, socioeconomic, and racial barriers to affect policies that impact their families, schools, and communities.

2011 RCA Summer Conference



2011 Events



April—Jayma Roten and Lavina Grandon (pictured here with Congressman Rick Crawford) visited with members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation and their staffs about Title I formula fairness in Washington, D.C.



January—Southern Echo held organizer training for community action in Dermott.



October—Lavina participated in Funders' Roundtable as part of Celebrate Advocacy Month activities.



September—RCA staff participated in training for the Arkansas Grade Level Reading Campaign.



October—North Central Arkansas chapters launched Ozark Byways, a regional revitalization project.



November—RCA collaborated with Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Mark Darr on a Rural Economic Development Listening Tour event in Weiner.



December—Dewey and Julia Harden, Dorothy Singleton, Lavina Grandon, and Renee Carr (shown here with Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation President SHEREE WEST) attended the national Opportunity to Learn summit in Washington, D.C.

Education

Rural Community Alliance members believe the safest, most nurturing environment for a child is a small school close to home. Members work for parent involvement, quality of education and positive school climate, and identification and interventions for at-risk students. In 2011, RCA members continued their involvement in their local schools and also collaborated with state and national efforts for better educational opportunities and more equitable access to education.



Formula Fairness Campaign. Rural Community Alliance is part of the on-going Formula Fairness Campaign to make the Title I funding formula fairer and more equitable. 2011 saw the All Children Are Equal Act filed in the House Education and Workforce Committee, and RCA members were able to enlist two Arkansas Congressmen, Rep. Mike Ross and Rep. Rick Crawford, as co-sponsors for the bill. The Formula Fairness Campaign is led by the Rural School and Community Trust.

Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign. As part of the national Opportunity to Learn campaign led by the Schott Foundation for Education, RCA participated in strategic planning for the Arkansas OTL campaign and attended the national OTL Summit in Washington, D.C. Working with others in the OTL coalition, members saw passage of important policy goals related to after-school and summer programs, access to college, and funding for rural transportation.

Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign. In August Rural Community Alliance joined a new network of educators, service providers, foundation funders, and non-profit organizations to launch the Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign, which aims to ensure that all students are reading at grade level by third grade.

Youth Development

Rural Community Alliance (RCA) supports and invests in rural youth. Young people are an important part of our work because they truly are the future of rural communities. If we are to see lasting change, we must find ways to involve young people. RCA engages youth on many levels—in community revitalization projects, in state-wide and national issues advocacy, in entrepreneurship training and projects, and in youth-led philanthropy.

In 2011 RCA's Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) groups participated in a number of activities that added value to their communities and schools. The Gentlemen of Knowledge (right) from Rivercrest High School started a very effective program to close achievement gaps.. The Alzheimer-Dollarway YEN's student photography project (below, left) showed barriers to opportunity as part of the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign. The Valley Springs YEN (below, center) raised money to install a fence to protect children at a popular local park.



YEN members at Rural Special (below, right) produced videos to promote their rural community and to display best practices at their local school. The Eudora YEN helped lobby for a resolution in the legislature to name September Arkansas Gospel Music Month and put on gospel music events. The Dermott YEN held a community health fair and provided new city welcome signs. The Bradley YEN did several community beautification projects. Paron students raised money for equipment to be used at community celebrations.

Several YENs participated in RCA's Youth Lens project, a collaboration with the Rural School and Community Trust's Center for Midwestern Initiatives. Students were given resources and incentives to produce videos that either promoted their community or documented best practices in their school or community. To date, youth at Rivercrest, Valley Springs, Fox, and St. Joe have posted videos on You Tube.



Policy Development

At the annual summer conference, Rural Community Alliance members engage in a collaborative process to identify state and local policies that favorably impact rural schools and communities. RCA staff develops materials for members to effectively convey their beliefs and priorities to policy makers and provides members with information to allow them to act in a timely manner to affect state, local, and national policy.

In 2011 members participated in the national **Formula Fairness Campaign** to revise the federal Title I funding formula to make it fairer and more equitable. Through RCA members' efforts, two Arkansas Congressmen, Rep. Mike Ross and Rep. Rick Crawford became co-sponsors of the All Children Are Equal Act, which was filed in the Education and Workforce Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

RCA staff and members also took part in strategic planning for the **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign**, which seeks through policy development and grass-roots activism to close opportunity gaps for low-income and minority students.

POLICY ISSUES SUPPORTED BY MEMBERS IN 2011

1. Requiring school districts to return unused buildings in consolidated schools to their communities
2. Funding for the Department of Rural Services
3. Preserving funding for isolated schools
4. Additional transportation funding for rural schools
5. Support for after-school and summer programs
6. Greater college access



Bruno-Pyatt chapter hosts "meet your legislator" day.



RCA youth Terrell Young participates in OTL strategic planning.

Rural Economic Development

From the Delta to the Ozarks, RCA members know that the survival of their rural communities depends on actively and aggressively pursuing new economic development options and thinking about economic development in new and innovative ways. That's why in 2011 Rural Community Alliance took a number of steps to help its chapters build capacity and form new relationships to address economic development needs



In the north central Ozarks (below, right), RCA helped 12 member chapters form the Ozark Byways Regional Revitalization Network (www.ozarkbyways.com), with plans to launch a similar project in southeast Arkansas in 2012. We collaborated with Lieutenant Governor Mark Darr (below, left) to begin a rural economic development listening tour to give voice to the concerns of rural residents. We helped chapter members in Elaine (pictured above with chapter leader Clyde Williams) initiate a community theater project to be used as an economic development tool. We facilitated trainings for other communities on establishing non-profit organizations and CDC's, non-profit board development, and establishing foundations and endowments to support local schools and community projects. And we continued and expanded holistic community revitalization projects first begun in 2008.



Save Our Rural Post Offices

In the summer of 2011, urged by members who faced losing an essential service in their communities, Rural Community Alliance took on a new challenge: Saving rural post offices.

Members and staff began attending local hearings and helping organize communities to fight the closing of their post offices. RCA staff established a website (www.saveourruralpostoffices.blogspot.com) that contains information and tools to fight the proposed closure of more than 170 rural Arkansas post offices. The website has attracted over 1,600 page views from all over the United States and several foreign countries.

In addition, RCA members' activism on the issue attracted national media attention from the Marguerite Casey Foundation's *Equal Voice* on-line magazine and the *New York Times*.

In the fall, Arkansas Congressman Rick Crawford and Senator John Boozman filed bills in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to limit closures of rural post offices, and Congress persuaded the U.S. Postal Service to declare a moratorium on post office closings until May of 2012.

The battle over the Post Office is expected to pick up again in late spring of 2012 when the moratorium expires, and RCA staff and members will be there fighting to preserve a service that keeps the flag flying in many small towns and rural areas across the state.



Community Revitalization

In 2008 Rural Community Alliance began facilitating a series of grass-roots revitalization projects in rural communities that felt the need and saw the opportunity to strengthen their economies, educational opportunities, and community services while preserving and celebrating natural resources and their local culture and heritage through a holistic strategic planning process. The year 2011 saw more and more communities pulling together to revitalize their communities, with some of the most active featured here.

Delight

Delight was the first RCA-facilitated revitalization project in 2008. Since then community members have accomplished the following: City-wide cleanup and beautification, development of a courtyard for public events in a downtown vacant lot, farmers market, concerts, heritage festival, open air performance stage, establishment of annual Christmas parade, fundraisers for Rosenwald school and production of historical pamphlet, grant writer training, entrepreneurship training, and advocacy for their local school.



Building on the past: SEPCA displays mementos of yesteryear.

As the Delight project evolved, community leaders formed the South East Pike County Alliance, a non-profit community development corporation, to guide activities. In 2011, this group received its 501c3 designation from the IRS, allowing it to pursue grants and tax-deductible donations. They also completed the construction of an open-air stage and purchased the old Delight railroad depot that will provide meeting space, house memorabilia, and serve as a welcome center for visitors. In October 2011 the town held its second annual South East Pike County Music Fest. One of SEPCA's primary goals remains to construct a museum to honor native son and country music legend Glen Campbell and display artifacts of bygone days in Delight and the surrounding area.

More information and pictures of the Delight project can be found on the RCA website, www.thenewrural.org.

Community Revitalization

Dermott

The Dermott community finalized their strategic plan in 2010 and have since been working diligently to revitalize their community. Their accomplishments in 2010 included various trainings for community organizing and community development, city-wide cleanup and beautification, Santa train and Christmas parade, shop-local campaign, a hospitality and tourism workshop, Youth Garden, grant for a Serenity Garden in the downtown area, and formation of a Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) group.



Dermott city and school leaders celebrate the awarding of the 2011 Annenberg School Fund grant.



Dermott Mayor Floyd Gray shows off Serenity Garden to visitor Lester Grandon.

Education has always been a special focus of the Dermott RCA chapter, and the group has been active in looking for ways to save and improve their small school. In 2011 with the help of RCA, Dermott Elementary received a \$100,000 grant to provide science equipment, library books and reading aids, mobile computer labs and place-based education training for teachers.

Also in 2011.... The community held a Stamp Out Smoking event with Dr. Jocelyn Elders as guest speaker. Phoenix Youth Center and Education and Economic Development groups hosted a Spring Break Jamboree for students. The Dermott Class of '78 organized a Back-to-School bash.



The Dermott YEN supplied new welcome signs for the city and hosted a health fair.

Community Revitalization

Leslie

In 2011 Leslie began its third year of community revitalization under the strategic plan facilitated by Rural Community Alliance and finalized in May 2009. The Leslie revitalization group has since received grants for improvements in community services, the city has received a clean-up and face lift, and 8 new businesses have opened.

This past year the community offered a historic walking tour for students and hosted what has become the annual Farmers Market, Fishing Derby, West Fest and Pageant, and Sugarplum Festival. In April Pine Grove Trails hosted a Ride for the Cure trail ride to raise funds for cancer treatment.

Historic buildings have been renovated to house businesses (those pictured right, as well as Arkansas Handmade, Carl's Place, and Cove Creek Clothing), and the city received a grant to renovate the historic City Hall. Work on a fun park is almost complete.

The community continues to promote its arts heritage with weekly performances at Ozarks Heritage Arts Center and Museum, as well as live music every Saturday night at the Drop Zone. The Merchants Association is promoting shopping and attractions with a billboard located on busy Highway 65 just north of Conway.

In October Leslie hosted the launch event for Ozark Byways, a regional revitalization project of Rural Community Alliance that includes Leslie and 11 other central Ozarks communities. Leslie is featured on the Ozark Byways website (www.ozarkbyways.com) and also has its own new website (www.lesliearkansas.org).



New business— Drop Zone



New business—Elk and Eagle Trading Post



On tour— Lieutenant Governor Mark Darr (back, right) talks rural economic development with local leaders Talitha Hardin, Adrienne Freeman, and Donald Ragland; Searcy County Judge Johnnie Hinchey; RCA staff Dorothy Singleton, Lavina Grandon, and Renee Carr; and State Representative David Branscum.

Community Revitalization

Eudora

Eudora continues its revitalization efforts begun in 2008 with activities centered around building community.

In April 2011 residents participated in what has become the annual Great American Clean-up. The J. Austin White Cultural Center developed a full schedule of events, with an emphasis on community participation. Community leaders met with Robin McLeod and Janet Perkins of the Arkansas Arts Council to discuss arts and heritage development, and the local Writers Guild produced a children's book.

The Eudora Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) and Gloryland Pastors Choir worked with State Representative Efreem Elliott, an RCA member, to proclaim September as Arkansas' Gospel Music Month. They helped plan and produce several gospel music events and competitions.

In October focus group leaders held a community meeting for reassessment and decided to continue focus on community beautification and pride, education, and arts and heritage.

In November, the Eudora revitalization group hosted a grant writing class which 20 people attended.

Paron

The rural community of Paron began a revitalization effort around their former school buildings when their high school was closed in 2006. Chapter Leader Jamie Mullins reports that project continues to grow with activities centered around youth and community.

The Paron Community Center hosted the first of the Saline County 4-H Iron Chef competitions. In 2011 Paron 4-H kids again showed well in county and state fairs with their chickens and rabbits. They displayed some their stock at Mayfest. Mayfest was again great fun with displays, vendors, music, a Paron Mayfest pageant, games and great food. The monthly breakfasts have proved to be a good social opportunity as well as a fund raiser for monthly utilities for the activities now housed in the former high school. There has been great progress in school/community relations with a fabulous new principal at the elementary school. The community center and elementary held a Back-to-School block party for a little end of summer fun. Local "homegrown" talent pitched in to perform in a MusicMaker Showcase to benefit the community center. Due to its success, they are going to make it part of Mayfest, their big annual community celebration.

"With lot of changes and positive activities in the works for the community center, 2012 is going to be a busy year for Paron! Can't wait to report on it!" says Mullins.

Community Revitalization

Greater Lead Hill Area

Since completing their strategic plan in 2010, the Greater Lead Hill Area — consisting of the communities of Diamond City, Lead Hill, and South Lead Hill — has focused on economic development, community services, arts and heritage, and education.

The three communities work together, holding joint Chamber of Commerce meetings, coordinating police protection, and forming a future planning committee to incorporate ideas for growth.

Other accomplishments include a new Diamond City welcome sign, fun park and pavilion for Lead Hill Park, lease of 7 acres from Corps of Engineers for Devil's Backbone wilderness park, submitting grants to upgrade water and sewer systems, new fiber optics cable for Diamond City for more reliable Internet and cell service, coordination with the County Sheriff's Department to provide services for communities on the lake, and working with Corps of Engineers for an agreement to build a new high-water dock to reduce the economic impact of lake flooding. Local events included Lead Hill's popular annual 4th of July Celebration and Diamond City's Fall Festival in September, which raised \$1,000 for the volunteer fire department. All three communities joined the new North Central Water System, which will provide abundant water for residential use and economic development. The Lead Hill YEN helped raise money for a new community message board.

In 2011 the Lead Hill School District fell below 350 enrollment, and the community has been very engaged in crafting a solution that would avoid closing the school.

Both Lead Hill and Diamond City joined the Ozark Byways regional revitalization project (www.ozarkbyways.com) and each has a new website connect to the project (www.leadhill.org) and (www.diamondcityar.org).



Community Revitalization

Fourche Valley

Rural communities throughout the state are taking their destinies into their own hands to create more opportunity and preserve the hometowns and values they love. Fourche Valley is one of the most active of these communities, working since their school closed to revitalize their culture and quality of life.

In 2011 the Fourche Valley community revitalization group has worked to get possession of their former school buildings, succeeding in obtaining the county-owned ABC building leased to the Fourche Valley Cultural Preservation and Restoration nonprofit. The 11th annual Fourche Valley Reunion raised \$3,000. They are selling Fourche Valley cookbooks and auctioning off rocks from an original school building to raise money. They formed committees to save the Gravelly and Bluffton post offices. Their community building has been designated as a polling site. They have submitted a grant for a Bluffton rural fire department building. They have developed a Fourche Valley Facebook page that is being used as a community bulletin board. A Fourche Valley Market Place has been added so people can post things they want to sell or give away, and businesses can post things they have for sale. The community is gearing up for an extensive letter writing campaign to get a cell tower or some alternative for the Valley.

St. Joe



RCA member Mayor John Henley led a project to restore the old St. Joe Depot, recreating a building that is about 95% authentically original. With numerous local volunteers and help from the Arkansas Railroad Society, the community held the grand opening of the restored depot at the end of May.

On the same site, the community collaborated with the Arkansas Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission to install a historic marker commemorating the skirmish at nearby Tomahawk.

Other efforts by the St. Joe community include establishing a non-profit Rural Help Center to offer adult education, GED testing, a thrift store, and monthly health screenings and on-going clean-up of the town. St. Joe joined the Ozark Byways regional revitalization project (www.ozarkbyways.com) and will have its own website in 2012. The St. Joe YEN did a promotional video of the depot project which has been posted on the RCA YouTube channel and the website of the Center for Midwestern Initiatives of the Rural School and Community Trust.

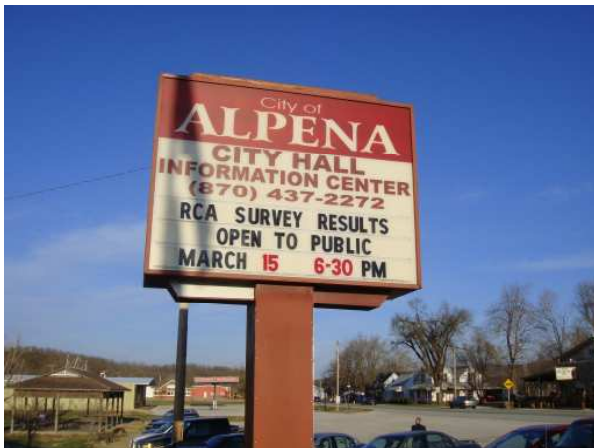
Community Revitalization

Alpena

The Alpena community spent the first half of 2011 conducting surveys, holding community forums and participating in focus groups to complete their strategic plan in August.

Since then the community has made a promotional video of their revitalization process; held an Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween on Hill Street, and a Christmas parade; and had a city-wide Maintenance Day. The community successfully applied for a Rural Development grant to help restore a historic building that is now a District Courthouse and Museum. The Alpena Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) provided a cell phone basics class for adults. A new grocery store/gas station has opened to supply much needed essentials to the community.

Alpena joined the Ozark Byways regional revitalization network (www.ozarkbyways.com) and will have a new website (www.alpenapass.org) in 2012.



Elaine

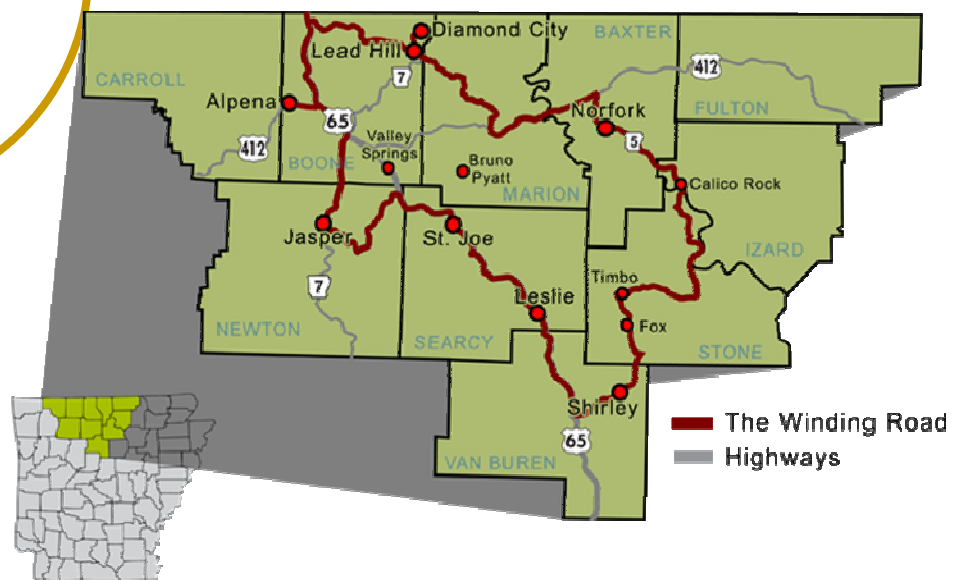
The newest RCA chapter to start a revitalization project is Elaine, in Phillips County. The Elaine group has long searched for a revitalization idea that fit the needs and assets of their town, and in the fall of 2011 in a strategic planning session with RCA staff they decided to develop a community theater project.

They quickly formed Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers (ECOS) and chose someone to send to the Swamp Gravy Institute in Colquitt, Georgia, to learn how to develop their project.

They have applied for two grants and have had training in forming a non-profit and in grant writing. We expect a great model to come out of this project for turning human capital into financial capital in low-wealth rural communities .



Ozark Byways Regional Revitalization Project



“Follow the winding road for a genuine Ozarks experience,” advises the new website www.ozarkbyways.com, created to promote RCA’s first regional revitalization project. The Ozark Byways project links 12 Rural Community Alliance chapters in the north central Ozarks in order to capitalize on common marketing, training, and capacity building. When complete, each community will have a website and Facebook page, all linked to each other and the Ozark Byways website. The communities will collaborate with inter- and intra-community marketing events and will promote local heritage sites and tourism. Each website will also highlight relocation services and will provide a snapshot of the rural and small-town assets of this 10-county area. RCA plans to bring together a similar network with chapters in Southeast Arkansas in late 2011, with others to develop later around revitalization projects and chapters in different parts of the state.



Chapter Reports

Rural Community Alliance has 1,316 members in 52 chapters throughout the state of Arkansas. Chapters are self-governing entities which are encouraged to “act locally but think state-wide.” Thus, each chapter is expected to carry out local advocacy and capacity building efforts in their school and community while participating in state, regional, and national activities that will benefit rural communities, students, and schools. Each chapter is led by a volunteer chapter leader, who is also part of the Rural Community Alliance Policy Council. Following is a list of Rural Community Alliance chapters and their activities in 2011.

Acorn

Chapter since 2008

Members: 10

Activities

- Members volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators

Alpena

Chapter since 2005

Members: 44

Activities

- Sent members to RCA conference
- Added new members
- Members volunteered at school
- Members volunteered at community events
- Members served on revitalization focus groups
- Members volunteered with historic restoration
- Members volunteered with community cleanup
- Sponsored Easter Egg Hunt, Christmas parade
- Got grant for historic building restoration
- Participated in merchants' group
- Attended City Council meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Submitted newspaper articles about school
- Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) group
- Joined Ozark Byways



(Left: Alpena residents are preserving their historic buildings and putting them to new uses.)

Alzheimer-Dollarway

Chapter since 2006

Members: 26

Activities

- Sent members to RCA annual conference
- Members volunteered at school
- Members organized fundraisers for Alzheimer Museum and Cultural Center
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in ESP selection process
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community events
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Sent member to OTL summit

Bismarck

Chapter since 2008

Members: 17

Activities

- Members volunteered at school
- Members participated in merchants group
- Volunteered at community events
- Attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators

Bruno-Pyatt

Chapter since 2005

Members: 30

Activities

- Added new members
- Hosted legislators at chapter meeting
- Members volunteered at school
- Members volunteered at community event
- Members helped preserve history/culture
- Members hosted community events
- Historic building being renovated
- Members participated in merchants group
- Members attended City Council meetings
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Attended school board meetings
- YEN participated in photo project
- Volunteered with after-school tutoring
- Submitted articles to newspaper
- Published promotional materials
- Participated in enrollment drive

Right: Sen. Johnny Key and Rep. Kelley Linck present Bruno-Pyatt students with flags at RCA chapter meeting.

Bearden

Chapter since 2009

Members: 20

Activities

- Members volunteered at school
- Members attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators

Bradley

Chapter since 2005

Members 104

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to RCA conference
- Members volunteered at school
- Members organized/volunteered at community events
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- YEN helped with park beautification

Below: Bradley chapter and YEN members beautify park.



Carlisle

Chapter since 2005

Members: 14

Activities

- Members volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community events

Centerpoint

Chapter since 2006

Members: 8

Activities:

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school

Below: RCA's Dorothy Singleton presents the Rural Achiever award to SEPCA at the 2nd annual Delight Music Fest in October.



Des Arc (Prairie County)

Chapter since 2005

Members: 15

Activities

- Sent members to RCA summer conference
- Members volunteered for flood relief
- Members volunteered at community event
- Members attended school board meetings
- Members contacted legislators

Right: Des Arc chapter leader Deanna Felts at RCA summer conference

Carthage

Chapter since 2006

Members: 5

Activities

- Members volunteered at community events
- Attended City Council meetings
- Participated in economic development Activities
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices

Delight

Chapter since 2005

Members: 92

Activities

- Added new members
- Members volunteered at school
- Volunteered/organized community events
- Produced 2nd annual music festival
- SEPCA obtained 501c3
- Served on revitalization focus groups
- 3rd annual Christmas parade
- Obtained facility for welcome center/SEPCA Headquarters
- Finished open air performance area
- Attended school board meetings
- Submitted newspaper articles
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices (Antoine)
- Contacted legislators
- City beautification
- Started new businesses



Dermott

Chapter since 2008

Members: 69

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended OTL summit in Washington, D.C.
- Held organizer training with Southern Echo
- Volunteered at school
- Organized community events
- City beautification
- Attended Chamber of Commerce meetings
- Attended City Council meetings
- Grant for Serenity Garden
- Attended school board meetings
- Back to School Bash
- Spring Break Jamboree
- YEN made new welcome signs
- YEN produced health fair
- Helped with after-school tutoring
- Submitted newspaper articles
- Received \$100,000 Annenberg School Fund Grant
- Teachers received place-based education training
- Held Fall Fest
- Revitalization report card showed 80% of projects completed
- Opened new businesses
- Grant writing training
- Hospitality and Tourism training
- Entrepreneurship training
- Contacted legislators

East Poinsett County

Chapter Since 2009

Members: 24

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community events



Lots of fun things to do at the Dermott Back-to-School Bash

Earle

Chapter since 2009

Members: 8

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Participated in community event
- Contacted legislators

Elaine

Chapter since 2006

Members 24

Activities

- Attended RCA summer conference
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community events
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Started community theater revitalization project
- Contacted legislators
- Added new members

Eudora

Chapter since 2005

Members: 62

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to RCA summer conference
- City-wide cleanup and beautification
- YEN lobbied for Gospel Music Month
- YEN helped with Gospel Music Month events
- Writers group published children's book
- Revitalization recalibration meeting
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community events
- Contacted legislators
- Hosted grant writing class



Eudora: Pastor Cedric Hayes of Gloryland Pastors Choir and Eudora YEN member accept check to help in organizing Gospel Music Month events.

Flippin

New chapter

Members: 4

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at school

Fouke

Emerging chapter

Members: 2

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community events

Fourche Valley

Chapter since 2009

Members: 18

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Organized alumni reunion
- Volunteered at community events
- Raised money for community projects
- Participated in school board election
- Participated in millage election
- Contacted legislators
- Applied for grant for fire station
- Developing community center
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Set up community Facebook page
- Working to get cell tower in the Valley

Friends of RCA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 51

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Provided technical assistance



Fourche Valley members held a public forum to discuss a school millage increase.

Genoa Central

Chapter since 2006

Members: 16

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators

Guy Perkins

Chapter since 2009

Members: 8

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators

Hampton

Chapter since 2005

Members: 7

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community events

Jasper

New chapter

Members: 12

Activities

- Volunteered at community events
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Added new businesses
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization project

Lafayette County

Emerging chapter

Members: 3

Activities

- Volunteered at community events
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators

Lead Hill Area

Chapter since 2006

Members: 38

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Participated in revitalization project
- Volunteered at community events
- Lead Hill 4th of July Celebration
- Diamond City Fall Festival
- Attended City Council meetings
- YEN group raised money for sign
- Obtained land for wilderness park
- Worked with Corps of Engineers for high-water dock
- Grant applications for water and sewer projects
- New fiber optics in Diamond City
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization project
- Held community meetings to discuss school Consolidation proposal
- New Lead Hill fun park



Lead Hill Area project leader Shari Marshall is sworn in as Diamond City mayor.

Leslie

Chapter since 2006

Members: 52

Activities

- Added new members
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in revitalization project
- Added new businesses
- New welcome banners on main street
- Merchants installed billboard on Hwy 65
- Sent members to RCA summer conference
- Hosted Lieutenant Governor Mark Darr to talk about rural economic development
- Weekly music performances at OHAC
- Play produced at OHAC
- Farmers Market
- Fishing Derby, Homecoming, West Fest, Sugarplum Festival
- Grant to renovate City Hall
- Continued work on Fun Park
- Continued city cleanup
- Chapter leader Talitha Hardin elected Mayor
- Attended City Council meetings
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization project
- New website
- On arts tour
- Leslie Facebook page
- Helped with historic walk for students
- Hosted Ozark Byways project launch
- Attended school board meetings

Marked Tree

Chapter since 2009

Members: 4

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community event



Leslie 3rd and 4th grade students visit historic train depot.

Marianna

Chapter since 2005

Members: 41

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community events
- Attended City Council meetings

Midland

Emerging Chapter

Members: 2

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators

Mineral Springs

Chapter since 2009

Members: 5

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators

Mt. Judea

New Chapter

Members: 2

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices

Norfolk

New Chapter

Members: 2

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community event
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization network

Oden

Chapter since 2005

Members: 25

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community event

Omaha

Chapter since 2009

Members: 5

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators

Osceola

Chapter since 2009

Members: 10

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community event

Paron

Chapter since 2006

Members: 13

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Hosted Paron Pride day
- Hosted May Fest
- Hosted 4-H Iron Chef competition
- Raised money for community center
- Continued developing community center
- Volunteered at community events
- Sent members to RCA summer conference
- Back-to-School block party
- YEN group
- Fall Fest



Paron YEN members fill bags for Fall Fest.

Plainview-Rover

Chapter since 2005

Members: 56

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Added new members
- Volunteered at community events
- Historic preservation of Old Town
- Hosted Fall Festival
- Participated in merchants group
- Attended City Council meetings
- Participated in millage campaign



Rivercrest High School Gentlemen of Knowledge did ground-breaking work on closing the achievement gap.

Rural Special/Rural special Youth

Chapter since 2005

Members: 110

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Submitted newspaper articles
- Youth Lens video project 7th grade test scores
- School foundation
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization project
- YEN oral history project

Poyen

Chapter since 2005

Members: 14

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in Save Our Post Offices
- Submitted newspaper articles
- Attended City Council meetings

Rivercrest

Chapter since 2009

Members: 18

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in national OTL summit in Washington, D.C.
- Gentlemen of Knowledge facilitated project to close achievement gap
- GOK presented at state School Board Conference
- GOK produced video documenting Student Voice project to close achievement gap
- GOK spoke to local schools and schools Around the state about closing achievement gap
- GOK featured in ASBA magazine

Rural Special, cont.

- Published promotional materials
- Participated in enrollment drive
- YEN produced promotional video for community
- Volunteered at community events
- Veterans Day event
- Participated in school board race
- Sent members to RCA summer conference
- Annual Fun Fest
- Member attended national OTL summit in Washington, D.C.
- Added new members
- Paved walking trail at park with grant

Smackover

Chapter since 2007

Members: 14

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community event

St. Joe

Chapter since 2009

Members: 20

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community event
- Restored historic railroad depot
- Installed historic marker
- Attended City Council meetings
- Established Rural Help Center
- City cleanup
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization network
- Held events to raise money for community projects
- Added new members
- YEN participated in student photography project on Opportunity to Learn
- YEN produced Youth Lens video documenting depot restoration
- Community held meetings to discuss merger of Ozark Mtn. School District with Lead Hill School District

Timbo

Chapter since 2007

Members: 9

Activities

- Participated in school board elections
- Volunteered at school
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization Network

Stephens

Chapter since 2009

Members: 5

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at community event
- Added new members
- Established YEN
- Participated in enrollment drive
- Sent members to RCA summer conference



RCA Executive Director Renee Carr talks with Mayor John Henley about St. Joe depot restoration.

Turrell

Chapter since 2006

Members: 17

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at community event

Valley Springs/ Valley Springs Student

Chapter since 2005

Members: 120

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community event
- YEN helped install protective fence at park
- Participated in school board election
- Contacted legislators
- Started Alumni Association
- Joined Ozark Byways regional revitalization network
- Sent members to RCA summer conference
- Participated in Save Our Post Office
- Member participated in national OTL summit in Washington, D.C.
- YEN produced video of Senior Scholars Program for Youth Lens project



Gary Funk, director of the Rural School and Community Trust's Center for Midwestern Initiatives, and RCA President Lavina Grandon award Valley Springs YEN a check for participation in the Youth Lens video project.

Weiner

Chapter since 2010

Members: 34

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community event
- Filed lawsuit to keep school open
- Maintained Friends of Weiner School District Facebook page
- Contacted legislators
- Hosted RCA Rural Economic Development Tour event with Lieutenant Governor Mark Darr
- Participated in enrollment campaign for school
- Supported bill to mitigate effects of Act 60



Michelle Cadle put together Rural Economic Development Listening Tour Event.

Funders and Donors

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Marguerite Casey Foundation
Schott Foundation for Public Education
Ben and Jerry's Foundation
Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas
Ron Crawford
Center for Midwestern Initiatives
Bank of the Ozarks
Financing Ozarks Rural Growth and Economy (FORGE)
Yellow Wood Associates
Ally Financial
Southern Partners Fund

Partners, Collaborators, Resources

The Rural School and Community Trust
Center for Midwestern Initiatives
Schott Foundation for Public Education
Formula Fairness Campaign
National Opportunity to Learn Campaign
Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign
Southern Echo, Inc.
CFO Rural Schools Partnership
Arkansas Rural Education Foundation
Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign
Arkansas Department of Rural Services
Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Department of Arkansas Heritage—Arkansas Arts Council
USDA Rural Development (Arkansas offices)
Regional economic development agencies
Planning and Development Districts

RCA Board



President – Lavina Grandon. A retired teacher with 32 years of experience in rural schools, Lavina Grandon led the opposition to Governor Mike Huckabee’s effort in 2003 to consolidate all schools in Arkansas with under 1500 enrollment. She lives in north central Arkansas and serves as a board member for the Rural School and Community Trust and the Valley Springs School District. Grandon is the founder of Rural Community Alliance and has been a board member since 2005.



Vice President —Erma Brown is a retired County Administrator for the Arkansas Department of Human Services. She holds a MS degree in Counseling. Currently she is the Region 13 School District Representative of the Arkansas School Boards Association and is on the Stephens School Board. She has served on the Arkansas Child Abuse Prevention Board, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and as president of the Women’s Crisis Center. Brown joined the board in 2009.



Secretary – Candace Williams. Candace Williams is a graduate of the University of Central Arkansas. She is currently a student in MPH program at UAMS and volunteers with the Faulkner County volunteer probation officer program and Boys and Girls Club of Faulkner county. She is from the small Delta town of Elaine, Arkansas. She has been a board member since 2007.



Treasurer – Kerry Cunningham. Kerry Cunningham is an educator from Plainview in the Ouachita Mountains of west central Arkansas. She has a Master’s degree in Education and holds a K-12 principal’s license and a reading specialist’s certification. She helps organize chapters in central and west central Arkansas. She has been a board member since 2005.



Member – Dorothy Singleton. Dorothy Singleton is a retired telephone company employee and community activist. She serves on the Board of Alzheimer Working Together in Alzheimer, Arkansas, and since 2004 has organized community members to support small and rural schools across the state. Singleton serves on the board of the Jefferson County Single Parent Scholarship Fund. She has been a board member since 2005.



Member — Beverly Cothran is a media specialist at Bruno-Pyatt school in the Ozark Mountain School District and organizes Frontier Days, serves with the Mid-Marion County Rotary as Interact leader, Marion County Youth Leadership sponsor, and works with children at Pyatt Baptist Church. She was Arkansas Rural Teacher of the Year in 2005 and has earned similar honors at the school and county level. She is a National Board Certified Teacher. Cothran’s term began in 2009.



Member—Andrew Taylor. Andrew (“Coach”) Taylor is a retired teacher and coach and is currently a builder from Eudora, Arkansas. He has been actively advocating for rural schools since 2005 and has been an integral part of the Eudora Community Revitalization Project. Coach Taylor’s board term began in July 2010.



Chapter Leader Advisory Member—Penny Harris is the chapter leader at Bradley and serves as an ex-officio member of the board in the role of chapter advisor. Penny is a phlebotomist, rural mail carrier, and community volunteer. Penny organized one of the first Rural Community Alliance chapters in 2005 and due to her strong leadership also has one of the largest and strongest chapters, with 104 members.

RCA Staff

Executive Director Renee Carr (back right) – Carr is a CPA with a master’s degree in Community and Economic Development. She handles finances, scheduling, and strategic planning and operations.

Policy and Education Director Lavina Grandon (front right) – Grandon is a retired teacher with a master’s degree in English. She produces publications and oversees development of policy and education initiatives.

Lead/Delta Organizer Dorothy Singleton (front left) – Singleton is a former telephone company employee and community volunteer. She trains new organizing staff and organizes communities in south and east Arkansas.

Project Director Matt Grandon (back center) – Grandon is a graphic artist with 14 years of professional experience. He oversees the Ozark Byways project; designs websites, signs, and graphic art; and organizes chapters in north central Arkansas.

Southwest Organizer Penny Harris (back, center) – Harris is a phlebotomist, rural mail carrier, and community organizer and volunteer. She works part-time organizing communities in southwest Arkansas.

Organizer Candace Williams (back left) – Williams is a graduate student in the Master’s of Public Health program at UAMS. From Elaine, she works part time helping with special projects and organizing in the Delta.



RCA History



Save Our Schools (2003) - Supporters across Arkansas rallied to save rural schools from consolidation and give them the funding they need.



Advocates for Community and Rural Education (2005) - Rural advocates formed a permanent nonprofit organization to advocate to preserve and support rural schools and communities..



Rural Community Alliance (2009) - ACRE members and board voted to change the name to Rural Community Alliance to reflect the organization’s increased emphasis on community revitalization and youth development—integrating efforts to preserve both school and community.

RCA History, cont.

Save Our Schools. Rural Community Alliance had its inception in 2003 in a grass-roots movement called Save Our Schools, which was formed by rural educators, students, and community members to resist a massive school consolidation plan that would have eliminated every Arkansas school district with fewer than 1,500 students. The statewide movement held local, regional, and state-wide rallies and led a grass-roots campaign to stop school consolidation and refocus attention on quality of education and an equitable school funding formula. Through the efforts of Save Our Schools and coalition partners, the proposed minimum enrollment number was reduced to 350, saving about 175 small rural schools; the Legislature mandated Education Renewal Zones to provide partnerships between rural schools and university education departments to improve academic outcomes; more money for high poverty and special needs money was added to the school funding formula; the state approved incentives for teachers to be employed in hard-to-staff areas; access to preschool was greatly expanded; distance learning technology was funded to give every school access to affordable high quality curriculum; and county-wide schools bills were defeated in three successive sessions of the Legislature.

Advocates for Community and Rural Education (ACRE). Following the 2003 regular and special sessions of the Arkansas Legislature (which lasted into April of 2004), rural education advocates realized that a permanent advocacy organization was needed to stand up for rural schools and students. With the help of mentors at the Rural School and Community Trust, grass-roots leaders chose a board and a name, wrote by-laws, incorporated as a nonprofit organization, and applied for charitable 501c3 status. With a board, one part-time organizer, and some dedicated volunteers, Advocates for Community and Rural Education began organizing chapters throughout the state. Leaders were greatly assisted during this period by training and mentoring from Southern Echo of Jackson, Mississippi, and continued involvement of the Rural School and Community Trust. During the period from 2005-2009, the organization helped numerous communities fight off attempts to close their schools after they were “administratively consolidated” or annexed following the enactment of a minimum enrollment number of 350 students. It maintained a website that provided information on rural education issues and policy efforts. It published a quarterly newsletter, regular e-mail updates, and educational materials to help members understand and advocate for their issues. Legislatively, members successfully advocated for funding for isolated and super-isolated schools and districts; school choice for students whose school was closed due to consolidation; and passage of a bill that provided for earlier notification of districts in danger of being on fiscal distress and prevented a district’s being placed on fiscal distress due to capital improvements. Their actions helped defeat a bill that would have given the State Board of Education the power to hire and fire school district superintendents. Chapters of Advocates for Community and Rural Education participated in a number of local efforts, including helping resolve a teachers strike, running candidates for school board, recruiting quality staff for their schools, running successful millage campaigns, helping their districts improve their financial situation, reducing violence on campus, producing brochures to attract more students, initiating tutoring programs, and holding school boards accountable. From 2006 to 2009, Advocates for Community and Rural Education’s summer conference trained more than 400 participants in education advocacy and community development.

Rural Community Alliance. As more rural school districts began to be in danger of not maintaining the minimum enrollment of 350 students, it gradually became clear to the ACRE board and staff that rural schools must be supported by thriving rural communities, and the loss of people and jobs must somehow be reversed to create a truly prosperous rural Arkansas. In the summer of 2008, the organization launched its Rural Community Revitalization Initiative to create a ground-up, grass-roots led revitalization process in which community members vision and plan to build on their past and their present to create a better future for their communities and their children. In the summer of 2009, the board proposed to ACRE membership that the organization change its name to Rural Community Alliance in recognition of the growing importance of this community-based work and its overarching significance for rural families, children, and schools. A membership campaign in late 2009 increased the membership base of Rural Community Alliance to over 1,000 members in more than 45 communities. As we move into new aspects of our work, we remain committed to our original purpose of empowering rural community members by “helping rural schools and communities survive and thrive.”

New Ways of Thinking About Rural Economic Development

Whether it's stopping the flight of capital through the passing of an ageing population, stopping the "brain drain" of the younger generation, or using human capital to create financial capital to replace lost assets and services, Rural Community Alliance chapters are developing new and innovative ways to revitalize and preserve their communities.

Foundations and Endowments. Through a collaboration with the Rural School and Community Trust's Center for Midwestern Initiatives, 10 rural communities recently received training in establishing local school or community foundations to tap into resources of alumni, former residents who have fond hometown memories, or local people who want to leave a piece of themselves to their communities. As this collaboration continues, foundations and endowment funds that develop from this effort will receive training and mentoring in fund development, sample founding and fund documents, and assistance in depositing and maintaining the funds. One such example already exists in Rural Education Heritage, Inc., a local foundation that was started by community members at Fox to support Rural Special School and enhance the educational opportunities in the community. In just three years the community has amassed over \$75,000 toward a pre-school building and business incubator.

Turning Human Capital into Financial Capital. The Elaine community is taking the example of the Swamp Gravy folk life play in Colquitt, Georgia, to raise funds to begin to restore lost services and assets in their town. Aiming to establish a community theater and write their own play with help from folks at the Swamp Gravy Institute, they plan to generate revenues from performances and invest them in a community development corporation. Similarly, the Delight Community is capitalizing on their music heritage to hold festivals and outdoor performances with the eventual goal of opening a Glen Campbell museum and planning other activities around that. They have formed the South East Pike County CDC and recently obtained their 501c3 status.

Re-purposing Vacated Properties. Due to school consolidations of recent years, many communities are looking for ways to convert vacant school buildings to community use. The Paron Pride community group has obtained the use of their former high school and filled it with a library, an exercise center, a community kitchen, and meeting space. The gym is open to youth basketball programs. Other facilities are being used as health clinics, city offices, and adult education facilities. At St. Joe the historic railroad depot was restored to serve as a tourist attraction and information/welcome center. The Alpena community purchased and restored a historic building to use as a courtroom for District Court and a museum.

Other creative examples of uses of vacated buildings include turning an abandoned cotton gin into a community theater and converting vintage agricultural buildings into unique bed and breakfasts.

Making the Most of Alumni Associations. Alumni associations can do more than organize the annual school reunion. Because they are passionate about their hometown and alma mater, engaged alumni are some of the best resources for rural places. At Dermott, the alumni association has taken the lead in motivating students to do well on tests, purchasing school supplies, and providing character building activities. Dermott alumni are also interested in expanding opportunity in the city as a whole and willing to make personal investments to see it happen.

Keeping Young People Engaged. In as many ways as possible Rural Community Alliance chapters create opportunities for young people to participate in their communities. Youth in RCA communities have helped with clean-up and beautification projects, created promotional videos, promoted and helped organize cultural events, produced health fairs, helped create public spaces such as parks and trails, and made many other investments in their communities. As youth invest in their communities, they tend to maintain that connection as they grow and mature.

Creating School-Community Partnerships. One RCA community is working on creating an internship program where students go to school, work at local businesses, and get credit while starting a career. They also want to develop an arrangement for their Student Council to shadow the City Council, thus keeping students engaged in local industry and government.

**We're creating a movement
to renew rural Arkansas.**

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