



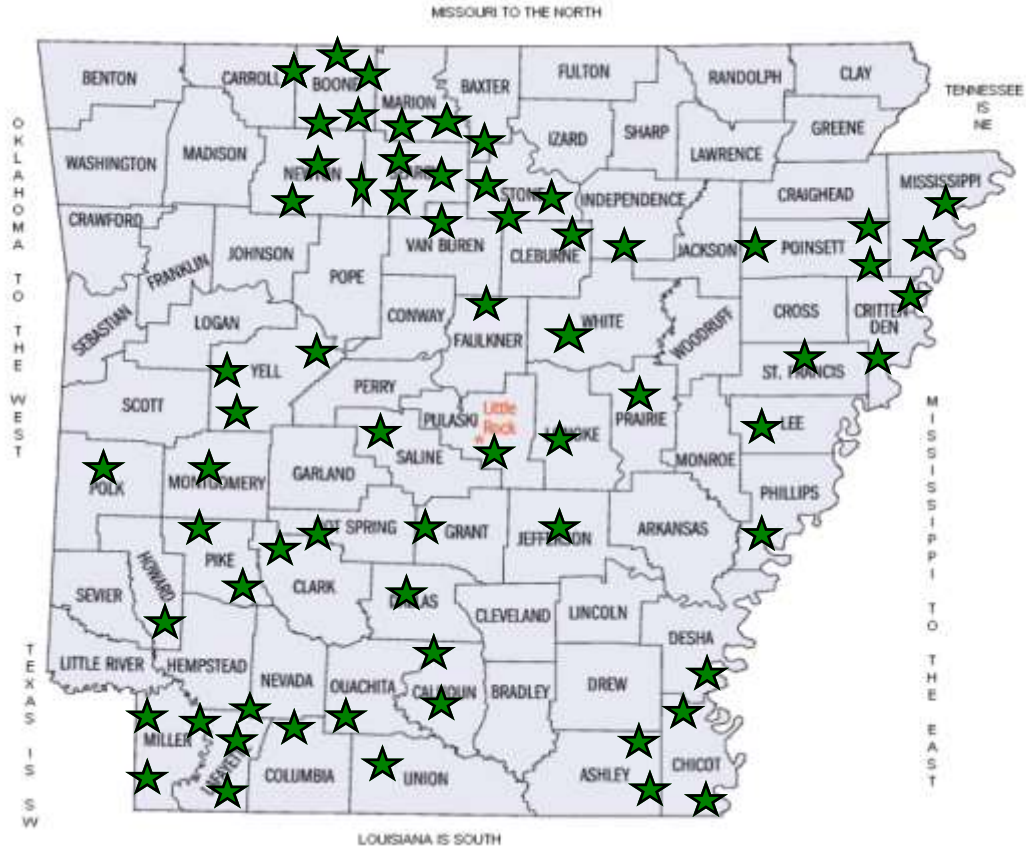
## 2016 Annual Report



*“No Arkansas Community Left Behind”*

[www.thenewrural.org](http://www.thenewrural.org)

# Where we are



RCA Chapter

Acorn	Dermott	Genoa Central	Mineral Springs	Rural Special
Alpena	Des Arc	Guy-Perkins	Montrose	Shirley
Alzheimer-Dollarway	Diamond City	Hampton	Mt. Judea	Smackover
Arkansas City	Doddridge	Hughes	Murfreesboro	Stephens
Bismarck	Earle	Jasper	Norfork	St. Joe
Bradley	East Poinsett County	Kirby	Oden	Timbo
Bruno-Pyatt	Elaine	Lafayette County	Omaha	Turrell
Carthage	Eudora	Lead Hill	Osceola	Valley Springs
Carlisle	Fairfield Bay	Leslie	Paron	Waldo
Centerpoint	Flippin	Marianna	Plainview-Rover	Weiner
Concord-Ida	Fouke	Marked Tree	Poyen	Western Yell County
Deer	Fourche Valley	Marshall	Rivercrest	Western Grove
Delight	Friends of RCA	McNeil	Rose Bud	Wilmot
				Witts Springs



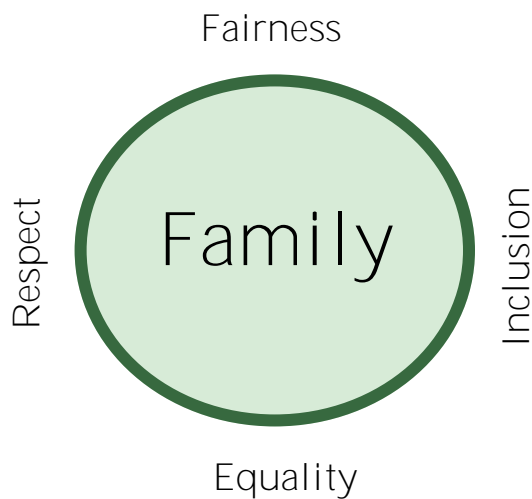
## RCA Vision

Rural Community Alliance members have a vision for just and thriving rural communities that offer access to an excellent education, economic opportunity, and rewarding quality of life to all residents.

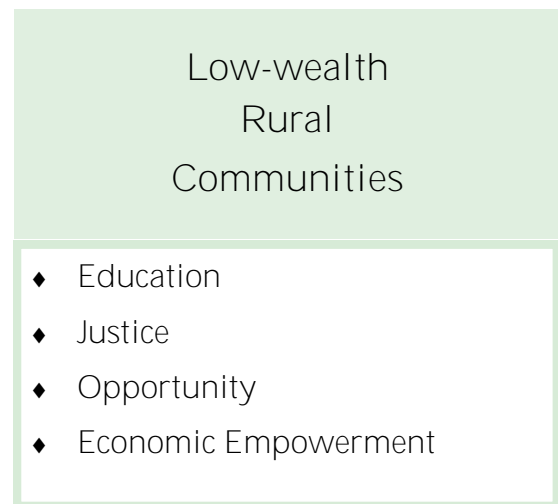
## RCA Mission

The mission of Rural Community Alliance is to empower people in rural communities to effect change by creating opportunities in education, community and economic development, and youth empowerment to improve quality of life and place.

## RCA Moral Center



## RCA Core Values



## RCA Theory of Change

The challenges for rural Arkansas are many: Economic decline in our communities, job loss, population loss, inequitable education funding, lack of resources for community needs, threats of school closures due to declining enrollment, the need to address social and racial inequality. However, our strength is in our people. When we work together across geographic, social, and racial barriers, we are capable of meeting any challenge.

RCA members believe change happens through informed and organized residents defining the change they want, building collective power, and taking action to improve their lives. We work to bring about change in communities with a process that starts with assessment and visioning, then strategic planning and implementation--all led and controlled by the grassroots. RCA staff supports community members with information, resources, and training.

# RCA Organizational Structure

## Board Members



Lavina Grandon, President



Erma Brown, Vice President



Andrew Taylor, Secretary



Kerry Cunningham, Treasurer



Mattie Allison, Member



Rickey Lambert, Member



Candy Webb, Chapter Representative



Lily Webb, Youth Representative

## Staff

Lincoln Barnett, Delta Regional Director  
Renee Carr, Chief Financial Officer  
Matt Grandon, Ozarks Regional Director  
Candace Williams, Executive Director  
Nick Cartwright, Northeast/Central Regional Director  
Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Regional Director  
Penny Harris, Southwest Regional Director



**66 Chapter Leaders**

**2,162 Members**

## What Chapters Do

RCA chapters are self-governing local organizations which agree to “act locally and think statewide.” They determine their own structure, procedures, and set of local issues. They are led by a volunteer Chapter Leader, who serves as the contact between members and RCA leadership and staff. RCA staff provides information, resources, and training to local groups. Members are asked to work collectively with other RCA members around the state on issues that will benefit low-wealth rural communities as a whole.



# RCA Education Advocacy

Rural Community Alliance members believe the best place for a child to be educated is a community school close to home. We believe that public education affords the most opportunity for the education of all children in the most equitable manner. We believe that it is every person's responsibility to contribute to an effective and efficient system of public education so that our democracy may prosper and our children may have bright futures.



RCA is a key partner in crafting, promoting, and implementing the state's ForwARd Vision for K-12 education.



Local leaders train to implement Community Schools.



Kirby is the second of our RCA chapters to become a School of Innovation.



Mt. Judea students help with economic development by painting a quilt block for the local quilt trail.



RCA partners with Rural Schools Collaborative to provide place-based education grants.



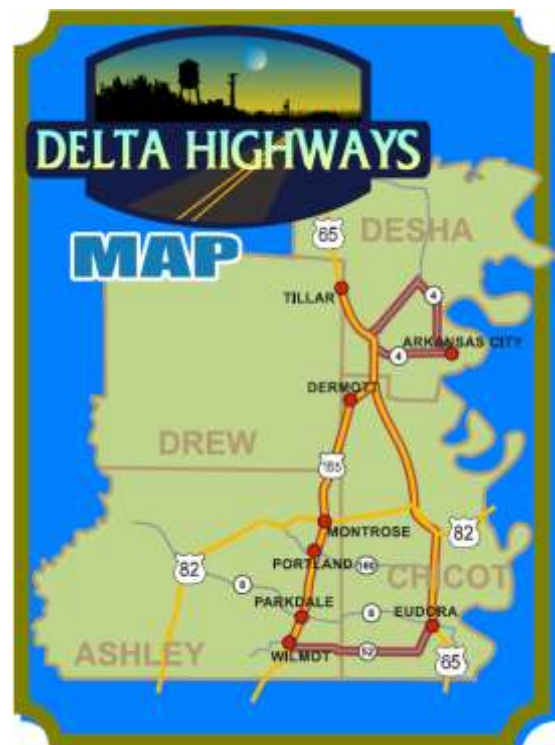
In the fall, chapters hold local Step Up for Public Schools walks.

# RCA Regional Revitalization Networks

Rural Community Alliance members recognize that in order to save their rural communities and make them more prosperous places to live and work they must pursue new economic development options and think about economic development in new and innovative ways.

In 2008, RCA began helping communities with grass-roots led holistic strategic planning and revitalization projects. Some of those projects have grown into targeted, themed economic development efforts, while others have become part of larger networks.

Almost half of RCA chapters are carrying out some level of community revitalization. In North Central Arkansas, 16 communities collaborate in the Ozark Byways revitalization network with a parent website, linked community websites, regional events, and a regional magazine. Delta Highways revitalization network serves small communities in Drew, Desha, Ashley, and Chicot Counties, and a new network called Jewel of the Red River is being formed in Southwest Arkansas. The networks combine opportunities for training, organizing, and marketing of member communities. More information can be found at [www.ozarkbyways.com](http://www.ozarkbyways.com) and [www.deltahighways.org](http://www.deltahighways.org).



Jewel of the Red River



# RCA Policy Development

In addition to working at the local level for better schools and more prosperous communities, RCA members collectively identify policies that will benefit rural Arkansas, and then they advocate for those policies on the state and local level.

At the 2016 annual conference, a Policy Council consisting of local chapter leaders met and identified policy issues the organization would pursue in the upcoming legislative session. At the end of the conference, members voted on the issues to rank them in order of importance. We also met with elected officials, and a panel of policy makers, mayors, and other office holders answered questions and gave their views on education, rural economic development, and advocacy. Step Up for Public Schools walks were held around the state in October to call attention to public education. (Below: Rep. Fred Love, Mayor Patricia Glover, Rep. Mary Bentley; members voting on issues; Ale-nora Williams and Penny Harris encouraging people to “Step Up for public schools.”)



# Youth Development

RCA practices an intergenerational model of organizing, believing that youth have an important voice and role to play in strengthening our schools and our communities. RCA youth take part in community revitalization projects and advocacy efforts. They attend conferences and make their voices heard on issues of concern.

Examples of youth involvement include a youth essay contest, youth presentations at the RCA Member Conference, youth involvement in the Elaine Fish Hook Theater Project, Grants in Place funding for local youth-led place-based education projects, and community service by youth in Paron, Dermott, Doddridge, and other chapters around the state. (Below, Norfolk community-based Youth Center, essay contest winner Elijah Stanton, mural painted by Alpena youth)



# Summer Conference 2016, Paron, A R:

## #Leave No Arkansas Community Behind

Each year RCA members gather from around the state to celebrate successes, share ideas, and plan for future work. In 2016 the annual member conference was held at the Community Center in Paron, in Central Arkansas.

This year's conference kicked off a new theme for RCA, Leave No Arkansas Community Behind, signifying our commitment to engage and assist more rural Arkansas Communities. Also featured was a Roll Call/Community poster contest, essay contest winners, education and economic development presentations, a youth panel that talked about youth organizing and participation, and a panel of elected officials who answered questions on issues related to public education and rural economic development. Members also developed policy issues for the 2017 legislative session.







# 2016 Events



Throughout the fall, RCA members, staff, and board worked with consultant Angela Duran to plot the next 5 years of serving rural Arkansas communities.



RCA/ForwARd Community Schools training



RCA members joined other public education advocates to rally for local control of public schools.



Ozark Byways Buy-Days continues to be a wildly popular regional event among RCA chapters in North Central Arkansas, drawing people from all over the area and from neighboring states. Here is a booth from one of our regional partners, the Diamond City Chamber of Commerce.





In our biennial Champions of Rural Arkansas, we honored Dr. David Raney, Governor Asa Hutchinson, Rep. Bruce Cozart, Rep. Mary Bentley, Rep. Charlotte Douglas, Col. (Ret.) Darryl Treat, Sen. Jack Crumbley, and Mayor Harry Brown.

*Rural Economic Development Summit and Regional Planning Event*



In October 2016 RCA's Ozark Byways hosted 40 representatives from other regions to an economic development and planning summit in Searcy County, where everything was discussed from community organizing to on-line marketing to agri-tourism to cycling events to building infrastructure and financing growth.



# RCA Chapters

Rural Community Alliance has 2,162 members in 66 chapters throughout the state of Arkansas. Chapters are self-governing entities which are encouraged to “act locally but think state-wide.” 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 some of their activities in 2016.

**Acorn:** Chapter since 2006, 9 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings.

**Alpena:** Chapter since 2005, 44 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, volunteered with historic restoration, volunteered with community cleanup; sponsored Christmas Parade, Antiques Fair, and Smokin’ the Pass BBQ contest, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, co-hosted WRF board meeting with RCA, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, two Grants in Place projects [www.alpenapass.org](http://www.alpenapass.org)

**Alzheimer-Dollarway:** Chapter since 2006, 48 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, hosted legislators at event, volunteered at community events, hosted community events, produced Jefferson County Parent Summit, added new members, participated in parent engagement group, submitted newspaper articles, organized community group for planning RCA/ForwARd Community School, attended OTL summit



**Arkansas City:** Chapter since 2012, 29 members, volunteered at community events, member of Delta Highways revitalization network, community food pantry, community website [arkansascityusa.com](http://arkansascityusa.com), attended city council meetings, submitted articles to newspaper, historic preservation project, contacted legislators, ran candidate in school board election, youth feeding program

**Bismarck:** Chapter since 2008, 18 members, volunteered at school, participated in merchants group, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, historic preservation activity, community festival, community food pantry

**Bradley:** Chapter since 2005, 86 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in school board election, attended school board meetings, community website, community Facebook page, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in rural economic development summit and regional planning

**Bruno-Pyatt:** Chapter since 2005, 42 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, produced heritage festival, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, contacted legislators, Grants in Place project

**Carthage:** Chapter since 2006, 5 members, volunteered at community events, attended City Council meetings, participated in economic development

**Carlisle:** Chapter since 2005, 16 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, volunteered at community events, hosted children’s author/reading

**Centerpoint:** Chapter since 2006, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

**Concord-Ida:** Chapter since 2012, 8 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meeting, participated in school board election, participated in education event, volunteered at community event, attended Quilt Trail planning meeting

**Deer:** New chapter, 27 members, attended RCA summer conference, attended school board meetings, youth essay contest winners, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

**Delight:** Chapter since 2005, 103 members, added new members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, produced annual music festival, served on revitalization focus groups, annual Christmas parade, attended school board meetings, submitted newspaper articles, city beautification, attended RCA conference, repurposed former school building for community purposes, added new members, Partnership Giving project, participated in rural economic development summit and regional economic development planning meeting, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, promoted youth development

**Dermott:** Chapter since 2008, 103 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended OTL summit, parent engagement group, volunteered at school, organized community events, produced Crawfish Festival, city beautification, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, submitted newspaper articles, in Delta Highways network, held teacher appreciation event, website [www.dermott.org](http://www.dermott.org), community Facebook page, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, organized community group for planning RCA/ForwARd Community School, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional economic development planning event

**Des Arc:** Chapter since 2005, 20 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at community events, attended RCA conference, **Imagination Library project, hosted children's author/reading event**

**Diamond City:** Chapter since 2006, 11 members, attended City Council meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, produced festivals, contacted legislators, received grants, participated in community foundation and Lakeshore Districts economic development network, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, held veterans celebrations, [www.diamondcityar.org](http://www.diamondcityar.org)

**Doddridge:** Chapter since 2012, 110 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, community beautification, attended OTL Summit, developed museum and historic site, held back-to-school event, gave out school supplies to youth, participated in merchants group, community Facebook page, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional economic development planning event

**Earle:** Chapter since 2009, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in community event, participated in historic preservation, attended RCA conference

**East Poinsett County:** Chapter since 2009, 16 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

**Elaine:** Chapter since 2006, 67 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, produced arts festival and community theater performance, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in Step-Up for Public Schools, participated in Good to Great pre-K project, contacted legislators, wrote grants, community website [www.elainear.org](http://www.elainear.org), community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, submitted articles for newspaper, started youth theater group, participated in Delta Highways revitalization network, historic preservation project, community garden project, participated in school board election, Dolly Parton Imagination Library project, attended RCA conference, AR-GLR activities

**Eudora:** Chapter since 2005, 92 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, city beautification, parent engagement group, community literacy project, participated in AR-GLR webinars, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, held summer festival, contacted legislators, held back-to-school event, summer feeding/learning program, after-school tutoring, member of Delta Highways revitalization network, Step Up for Public Schools walk, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning [www.eudoraar.org](http://www.eudoraar.org)

**Fairfield Bay:** Chapter since 2014, 31 members, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, produced community events, community website [visitfairfieldbay.com](http://visitfairfieldbay.com), attended city council meetings, participated in RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning



**Flippin:** Chapter since 2011, 5 members, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign, participated in GLR Attendance Works project

**Fouke:** Chapter since 2012, 15 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in education event, community website, community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, community festival, contacted legislators, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning

**Fourche Valley:** Chapter since 2009, 53 members, organized alumni reunion, volunteered at community events, raised money for community projects, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, community Facebook page

**Friends of RCA:** Chapter since 2005, 73 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, provided technical assistance, contacted legislators

**Genoa Central:** Chapter since 2006, 15 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, helped with a tutoring program

**Guy-Perkins:** Chapter since 2009, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

**Hampton:** Chapter since 2005, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, attended legislative committee hearings

**Hughes:** Chapter since 2014, 35 members, sent members to RCA conference, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended school board meetings, held education event, volunteered at school, organized a community event, conducted a community improvement project, attended city council meetings, helped with tutoring program, summer submitted newspaper articles

**Jasper:** Emerging chapter, 2 members, participated in Ozark Byways regional network and events, community website [www.theozarkmountains.com](http://www.theozarkmountains.com), held community festivals and events

**Kirby:** Chapter since 2014, 32 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, volunteered at community event, participated in community revitalization, community Facebook page, community festival, contacted legislators, worked to increase school enrollment

**Lafayette County:** Chapter since 2012, 31 members, added new members, volunteered at community events, volunteered at school, participated in school board election, participated in education event, contacted legislators, participated in economic development activities, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, community garden, applied for grant for community improvement, merchants group, attended city council meetings, youth development program, tutoring program, Step Up for Public Schools walk

**Lead Hill:** Chapter since 2006, 23 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, attended city council meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, participated in Lakeshore Districts economic development campaign, volunteered at community events, **Lead Hill 4th of July Celebration and Parade, held veterans' event**, participated in Ozark Byways regional planning and events, Facebook page, submitted newspaper articles, Step Up for Public Schools walk, helped with tutoring program, hosted legislators [www.leadhill.org](http://www.leadhill.org)

**Leslie:** Chapter since 2006, 56 members, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, participated in revitalization project, added new businesses, participated in Searcy County Chamber of Commerce, volunteered at community events, regular performances at OHAC, Farmers Market, Fishing Derby, Homecoming, West Fest, Sugarplum Festival, city-wide cleanup, attended city council meetings, Merchants Association, on arts tour, Facebook page, city-wide rummage sale, lawn mower races, annual Mountain Man Rendezvous, Ancestor Fair, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, participated in RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning [www.lesliearkansas.org](http://www.lesliearkansas.org)

**Marianna:** Chapter since 2005, 43 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, attended RCA conference, youth development program, community improvement project, attended OTL Summit, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, attended city council meetings, Step Up for Public Schools walk

**Marshall:** Chapter since 2013, 33 members, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, participated in Searcy County Chamber of Commerce, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, held community events, volunteered at school, Facebook page, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, historic preservation, developed community projects, participated in developing regional project [www.marshallar.org](http://www.marshallar.org)

**Marked Tree:** Chapter since 2009, 4 members, volunteered at school

**McNeil:** New chapter, 5 members, added new members, members volunteered at school, members organized/volunteered at community events, community improvement project, historic preservation, participated in RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, tutoring program, submitted newspaper articles, Step Up for Public Schools walk

**Montrose:** Chapter since 2013, 3 members, attended city council meetings, community festival, youth development project, historic preservation

**Mineral Springs:** Chapter since 2009, 5 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school board election

**Mt. Judea:** Chapter since 2011, 47 members, added new members, attended OTL summit, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, summer learning camp, Mt. Judea Area Alliance, Christmas parade, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, applied for grant, produced heritage festival, [www.mtjudea.org](http://www.mtjudea.org), participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in Partnership Giving initiative, organized artists and artisans coop, historic preservation, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, joined Arkansas Quilt Trails, AR-GLR activities





**Murfreesboro:** Emerging chapter, 3 members

**Norfolk:** Chapter since 2011, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, Pioneer Days festival, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, linked to Ozark Byways website, youth development program [www.cityofnorfolk.org](http://www.cityofnorfolk.org)

**Oden:** Chapter since 2005, 24 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in education event, historic preservation, Facebook page, community beautification, community festival, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper

**Omaha:** Chapter since 2009, 5 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

**Osceola:** Chapter since 2009, 9 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

**Paron:** Chapter since 2006, 25 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, participated in school election, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, hosted Paron Pride day, Hosted Mayfest, maintained community center, volunteered at community events, attended RCA Conference, Fall Fest, youth engagement, Facebook page

**Plainview-Rover:** Chapter since 2005, 58 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, attended rural education conference, hosted fall festival, participated in merchants group, attended city council meetings, attended RCA conference, Farm to School grant and project

**Poyen:** Chapter since 2005, 31 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, historic preservation, youth development projects, hosted RCA summer conference, community Facebook page

**Rose Bud:** New chapter, 15 members, added new members, worked on community project, attended city council meetings, attended RCA summer conference, attended RCA rural economic development summit and planning session, attended OTL Summit, economic development training

**Rivercrest:** Chapter since 2009, 8 members, volunteered at school

**Rural Special:** Chapter since 2005, 129 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, contacted legislators, submitted newspaper articles, school foundation, Ozark Byways revitalization project, [YouTube.com/FoxArkansas](http://YouTube.com/FoxArkansas), volunteered at community events, Fox Fun Fest, Veterans Day event, attended RCA conference, attended Arkansas Grade-Level Reading events, on AR-GLR steering committee, linked to Ozark Byways website, volunteered at community event, historic preservation, community Facebook page, community beautification, submitted articles for newspaper, grant for school and community improvement, Grants in Place project, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Arkansas and Stone County Quilt Trails, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning

**Shirley:** Chapter since 2013, 22 members, held annual Shirley Homecoming, attended city council meetings, participated in Ozark Byways regional network, produced Halloween and Christmas events with gifts and treats for children, staffed Shirley Museum, [www.shirleyarkansas.org](http://www.shirleyarkansas.org), volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in education event, historic preservation, community beautification, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, participated in developing regional attraction

**Smackover:** Chapter since 2007, 13 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

**Stephens:** Chapter since 2009, 20 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, participated in education event, historic preservation, community revitalization, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, attended RCA summer conference, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, Step Up for Public Schools walk

**St. Joe:** Chapter since 2009, 43 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, restoring historic railroad depot, Searcy County Rural Help Center, attended city council meetings, city clean-up, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, held events to raise money for community projects, added new members, attended RCA summer conference, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning [www.stjoearkansas.org](http://www.stjoearkansas.org)



**Timbo:** Chapter since 2007, 19 members, added new members, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Ozark Byways regional revitalization network, hosted alumni reunion, volunteered/hosted community event, school improvement project, historic preservation, Step Up for Public Schools walk

**Turrell:** Chapter since 2006, 17 members

**Valley Springs:** Chapter since 2005, 171 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, Valley Springs School and Community Foundation, participated in **Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, attended RCA conference, maintained children's book exchange, bought bicycles** for attendance incentive at school, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended OTL Summit, participated in RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning [www.valleyspringsar.org](http://www.valleyspringsar.org)

**Waldo:** Chapter since 2012, 25 members, added new members, attended city council meetings, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspapers, contacted legislators, helped with tutoring program, attended RCA summer conference, applied for grant, attended RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning

**Weiner:** Chapter since 2010, 36 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, worked to keep school campuses open, maintained Friends of Weiner School District Facebook page, contacted legislators, working on school of agriculture

**Western Grove:** Chapter since 2014, 7 members

**Western Yell County:** Chapter since 2012, 42 members, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, community revitalization

**Wilmot:** Chapter since 2014, 11 members, attended school board meetings, worked to keep school open, volunteered at community event, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, participated in regional revitalization network, organized community events, youth development project, participated in economic development event, submitted newspaper articles

**Witts Springs:** Chapter since 2014, 32 members, added new members, volunteered at community events, community festival, community Facebook page, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, community improvement grant, historic preservation, farmers market, members participated in training, submitted newspaper articles, participated in the RCA rural economic development summit and regional planning, helped develop regional project [www.wittsprings.com](http://www.wittsprings.com)



## RCA Accomplishments

Below is a partial list of accomplishments of RCA members and their allies since the organization was formed in 2003.

1. In consolidation controversy, reduced minimum enrollment number from 1,500 to 350 to save 175 rural school districts.
2. Education Renewal Zones to create public school/university partnerships to improve academic achievement.
3. Poverty and English Language Learner funding.
4. Funding for preschool.
5. Prevented passage of county-wide schools in 2003, 2004, and 2005.
6. Distance learning capability for every school district.
7. Helped get and preserve funding for isolated and super-isolated schools.
8. Defeated a bill that gave the State Board power to hire and fire school district superintendents.
9. **Successfully promoted a law to prevent a school's being on fiscal distress due to capital improvements and extending timelines for classification and improvement.**
10. Successfully promoted a law to allow freedom of choice to students whose school had been consolidated.
11. Chapters at Lead Hill, Bismark, Midland, and Western Yell County helped get their schools off fiscal distress.

12. Youth enterprise training for 30 youths, grants for 7.
13. Helped local chapters run members for school board, pass millage increases, improve school climate, start parent involvement projects, establish tutoring programs, recruit highly qualified leadership for schools.
14. Disincentived closing isolated campuses by blocking a bill to allow isolated funding to follow the student even if a campus is closed.
15. Taught financial literacy to over 2,000 rural youth and adults.
16. Participating in Opportunity to Learn Campaign
17. Participating in Formula Fairness Campaign
18. Participating in Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign
19. **Participating in Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign**
20. Participating in Moving the Needle on Poverty Campaign
21. Passed a law to return unused buildings in consolidated school districts to the community.
22. Blocked a bill to allow the State Department of Education to close an isolated school without a vote by the local school board.
23. Held economic development town halls with Lt. Gov. Mark Darr at Leslie and Weiner.
24. Youth Empowerment Network in 15 rural communities.
25. Led a state-wide effort to save rural post offices. Established a website to educate and inform public. Secured support in the form of bills filed in Congress from Congressman Rick Crawford and Senator John Boozman.
26. Helped Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers form community development corporation and community theater.
27. Helped Valley Springs and Lead Hill/Diamond City form school and community foundations. Trained 25 community leaders in forming local foundations and endowments.
28. Leadership training for over 1,000 people. Board training and grant writing training for over 100 people.
29. Successfully promoted law extending timeline for schools on fiscal, academic, or facilities distress.
30. Chapter at Fox established school foundation, built building, and established ABC preschool.
31. Successfully promoted law for joint use of facilities by school and communities.
32. Laws strengthening parent engagement.
33. Held Jefferson County Parent Engagement Summit.
34. Developed models for parent engagement in low-income rural communities.
35. Blocked unaccountable Charter School Commission.
36. Blocked bill to divert state funds from education and other services to state highway department.
37. Revitalization projects in 26 chapters, two regional revitalization networks.
38. Set up Facebook page to call attention to Act 60 consolidations: [Facebook.com/arkansasruralschools](https://www.facebook.com/arkansasruralschools).
39. Produced video series about benefits of rural schools.
40. Initiated interim study of effects of Act 60, legislation passed for waiver from consolidation for schools not in academic or fiscal distress
41. Interim study for schools of agriculture, legislation passed for pilot schools of agriculture
42. Step Up for Public Schools walks in 20 communities
43. Social media platform: 24 websites, 3 Facebook pages, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram
44. Participated in ForwARd process for preK-16 strategic plan for education.
45. Participate in ForwARd Implementation Working Group
46. Helped advocate for \$3M increase in Pre-K funding
47. Helped defeat a publicly funded private school voucher bill.
48. Produced rural economic development summit with 40 participants
49. Arkansas Quilt Trails project, 3 revitalization networks
50. 2,162 members in 66 chapters.



# RCA History

## Save Our Schools.

Rural Community Alliance began in 2003 as a grass-roots movement called Save Our Schools. SOS 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.



Bruno-Pyatt residents voicing their concerns at the Capitol in March 2003



RCA President Lavina Grandon speaking at a Save Our Schools rally in February 2003

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. 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.



Left: Since 2006 members have gathered each summer to share their stories, participate in training, and make decisions that guide the organization.

During the period from 2005 to 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, improving school climate, 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.**



Bismarck supporters ran a successful campaign to pass a millage to get their school off of fiscal and facilities distress.

**Rural Community Alliance.** As more rural school districts began to be in danger of not maintaining the minimum enrollment, 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 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. 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 its 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.



Participants in RCA rural economic development summit get a taste of Searcy County agritourism.

As RCA expanded we remained committed to our original purpose of empowering rural community members by “helping rural schools and communities survive and thrive.” We joined the Equal Voice Campaign for America’s Families, the Formula Fairness Campaign to equalize funding for Title I students, the Opportunity to Learn Campaign, and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading to advocate for sufficient and equitable funding for education. We helped shape the ForwARd vision for preK-12 education and are involved in its implementation. We have formed revitalization networks to magnify the voice and influence of small rural communities. We continued to advocate for policy issues that create opportunities for rural schools and people. Since 2003 RCA has engaged more than 2,100 members in 66 chapters and trained over 1,200 rural leaders.

# Rural People Working Together

## **Education Youth Development Community Revitalization Policy Development**

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

**Candace Williams, Executive Director**

401 South Scott Street, Ste. 7

Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: 870-714-0881

Fax: 866-824-9598

E-mail: [williams@thenewrural.org](mailto:williams@thenewrural.org)

**[www.thenewrural.org](http://www.thenewrural.org)**

[Facebook.com/ruralcommunityalliance](https://www.facebook.com/ruralcommunityalliance)

[Youtube.com/thenewruralarkansas](https://www.youtube.com/thenewruralarkansas)

Twitter: TheNewRuralAr (not caps sensitive)

Instagram: TheNewRuralAr

[www.ozarkbyways.com](http://www.ozarkbyways.com)

[www.deltahighways.org](http://www.deltahighways.org)

### **Staff Contacts**

Renee Carr, Chief Financial Officer  
870-615-2195 [carr@thenewrural.org](mailto:carr@thenewrural.org)

Matt Grandon, Ozarks Director/Web Designer  
870-754-5554 [ozarkbyways@gmail.com](mailto:ozarkbyways@gmail.com)

Nick Cartwright, Northeast Regional Director  
501-837-0593 [ncartwrighteast@gmail.com](mailto:ncartwrighteast@gmail.com)

Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Region Director  
870-538-4051 [broadnax@thenewrural.org](mailto:broadnax@thenewrural.org)

Lincoln Barnett, Delta Regional Director  
901-395-3023 [lincebarnett@gmail.com](mailto:lincebarnett@gmail.com)

Penny Harris, Southwest Region Director  
903-224-5752 [harris@thenewrural.org](mailto:harris@thenewrural.org)