

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

HELPING RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES SURVIVE AND THRIVE

2017 Annual Report

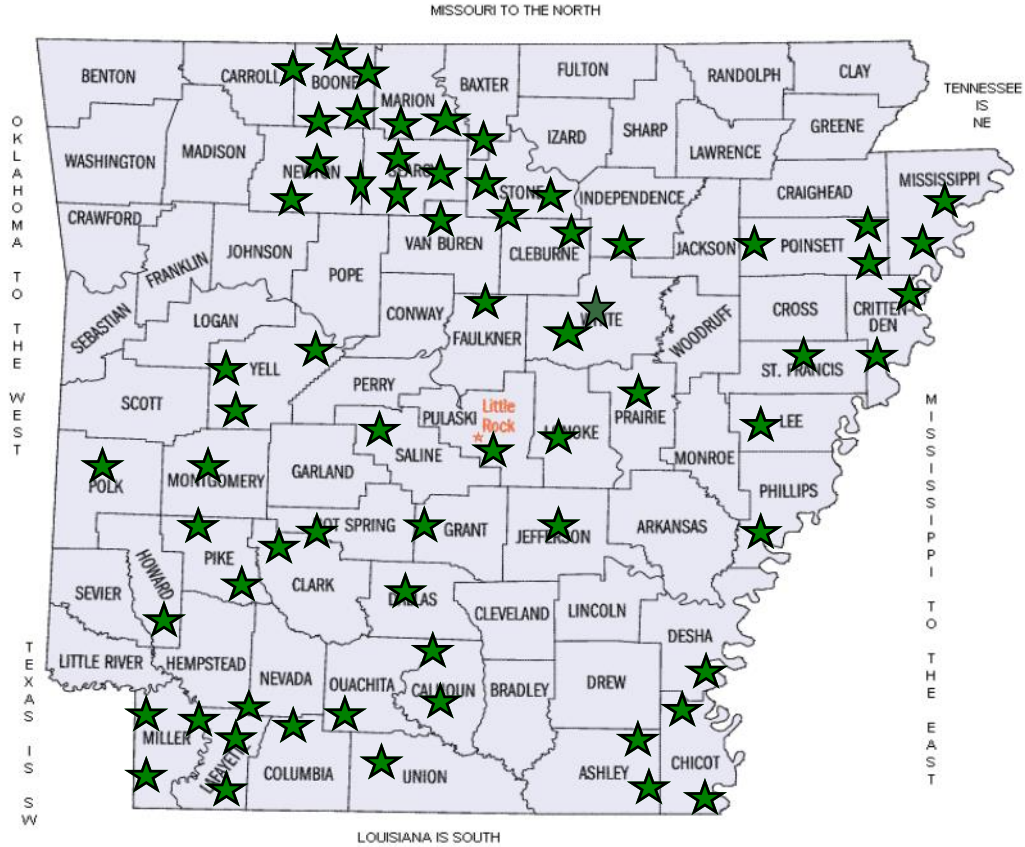


★ RCA Chapter

“Leave No Arkansas Community Behind”

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	Norfolk	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	Romance/Floyd	Wilmot
			Rose Bud	Witts Springs



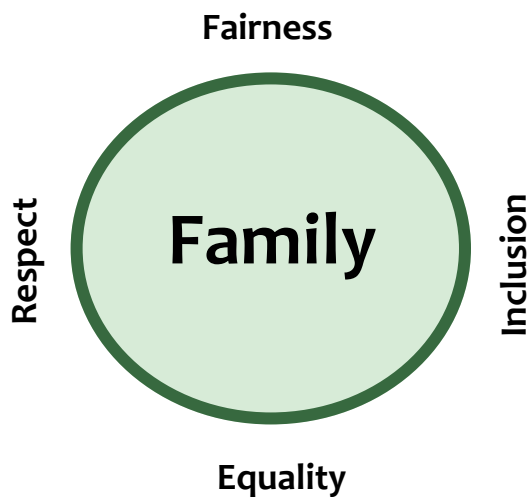
RCA Vision

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

Low-wealth Rural Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Education ◆ Justice ◆ Opportunity ◆ Economic Empowerment

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, North Central Regional Director
Candace Williams, Executive Director
Nick Cartwright, Northeast/Central Regional Director
Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Regional Director
Penny Harris, Southwest Regional Director



67 Chapter Leaders

2,199 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.

Our Partners



Our Funders

- Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
- Catholic Campaign for Human Development
- Southern Partners Fund
- Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
- New World Foundation
- Abelard Foundation
- Schott Foundation for Public Education

RCA Education Advocacy

Rural Community Alliance holds these core beliefs, which guide and inform both our education advocacy and our place-based education work.

- The best place for a child to be educated is in a small school close to home.
- Traditional public schools governed by democratically elected school boards tied to specific geographical areas provide the best guarantee of equity, stability of educational delivery, and parent and community engagement with schools.
- Privatization efforts such as charter schools, vouchers, and tax credits for private tuition undermine the funding and stability of public schools, which serve all students.
- Education partners include: **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign, ForwARd Arkansas, Arkansas Grade-level Reading Campaign, Arkansans for Quality Education and Rural Schools Collaborative.**



RCA staff meets regularly with Opportunity to Learn partners and collaborates on policy initiatives that close the opportunity gap.



As part of the ForwARd Arkansas coalition, we partnered in raising awareness and advocating for increased funding for pre-K.



In 2017 RCA partnered with Delta Corps to provide literacy coaches to enhance grade-level reading in three Delta Communities.



RCA partners with Rural Schools Collaborative to fund place-based education projects like this parent engagement workshop in Dermott.



Many RCA communities host back-to-school events like this one in Marianna, where they hold motivational events and give out backpacks and school supplies to returning students.





Communities from Jonesboro to Elaine to Bradley to Doddridge to Waldo held **Step Up for Public Schools** walks to bring awareness to the need to support local public schools. RCA launched a new **Public School by Choice** campaign to recruit advocates to help preserve the promise of public education.



Support public education. Sign our petition at TheNewRural.org/petition



RCA Executive Director testifies before the House Education Committee, and RCA and advocacy partners help defeat a private school voucher bill in the 2017 legislative session.



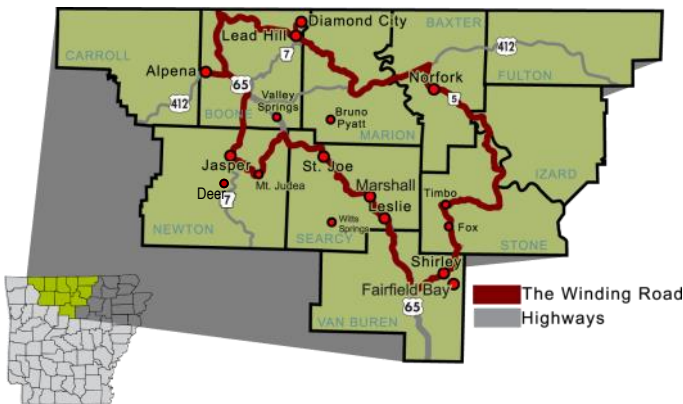
(Left) In partnership with AR Grade Level Reading and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, RCA staff and leaders train in Chicago to establish a highly successful Parent Mentoring Project in Eudora. (Right) SW Arkansas advocates attend an education forum in Texarkana.

RCA Rural Community Revitalization

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.

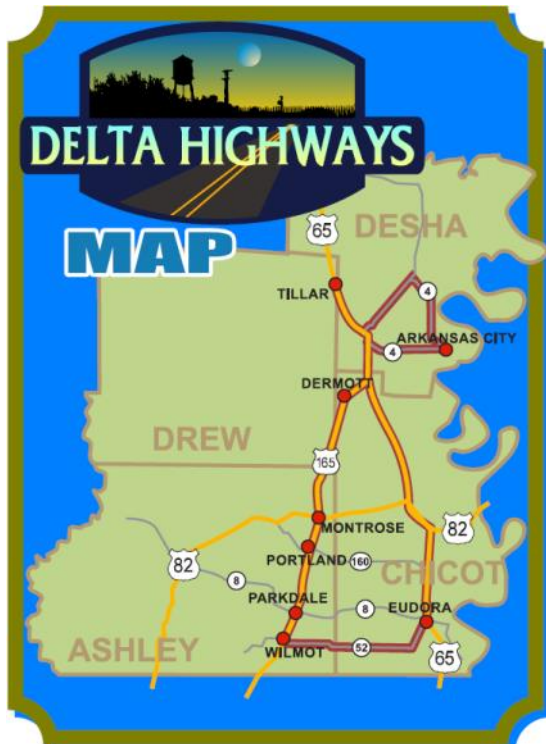
Almost half of RCA chapters are carrying out some level of community revitalization. In North Central Arkansas, 17 communities collaborate in the Ozark Byways revitalization network with a parent website, linked community websites, regional events, and a regional magazine. Delta Highways revitalization 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 and www.deltahighways.org.



Ozark Byways regional economic development meeting at Norfork



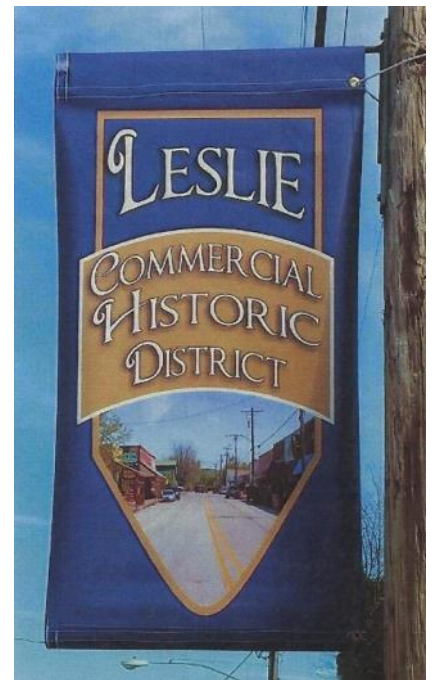
Jewel of the Red River (Southwest Arkansas) regional economic development meeting at Logoly State Park, McNeil



Southeast Arkansas economic development meeting at Eudora



RCA launches arkansasquilttrails.com



Delight RCA chapter economic development meeting



Active tourism with Witts Springs' Pedestal Rock 40 bicycle ride

2017 Events



Young Leaders for Social Change convening with Southern Partners Fund



Racial equity training with Greg Hodge



Alliance for Justice training on lobbying



Nick Cartwright presenting to Arkansas Teacher Corps about working in rural communities



RCA/Rural Schools Collaborative Hub Announcement at Marshall High School—Searcy County School District



Eudora Reads participating in Arkansas Grade Level Reading recognition gala at the Governor's Mansion



Community members in Dermott, Dollarway, and Marianna planning for RCA/Forward Community Schools in their school districts



Students at Norfolk with Governor Hutchinson as the city's Wolf House is recognized as a state historic site



Waldo chapter's community health fair



House and Senate Education Committees meet at Marvell-Elaine.



#LeaveNoArkansasCommunityBehind 2.0





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 communities.

In 2017 RCA reactivated our Youth Empowerment Network with the formation of a Youth Advisory Council that guides youth work throughout the state.



RCA youth from Earle, Marianna, Rose Bud, Dermott, Hughes, Paron, Deer, Mt. Judea, and Valley Springs participate in Youth Day at the Capitol.

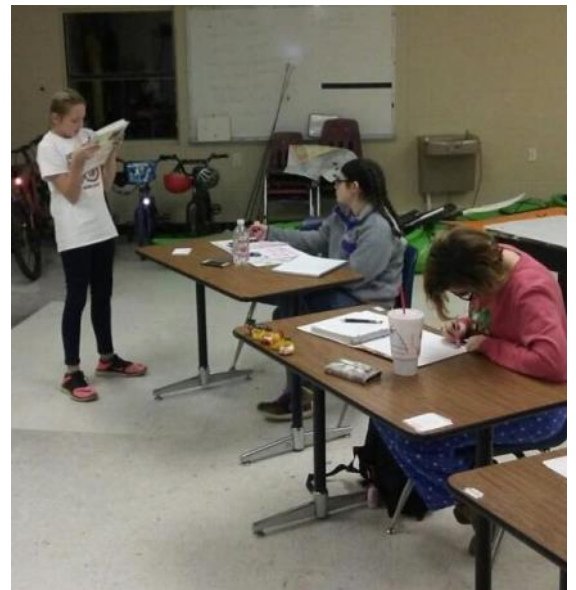


Left: Rural Youth of Saline County (Paron Chapter) do many things within and beyond their community.

Right: Youth from Earle explain their Civic Engagement/Get Out the Vote project funded in part with a RCA/Rural Schools Collaborative place-based grant.



Rural Special youth collected shoes as a fundraiser for Ozark Water Project, a charity that drills wells in developing countries.



Paron youth train to develop skills to be veterinarian assistants.



Rose Bud youth receive Giving Tree grant for a youth development program.



Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers engage youth in community theater to preserve their stories and celebrate their history.



Stephens youth identify goals for their community.

RCA Chapters

Rural Community Alliance has 2,199 members in 67 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 2017.

Acorn: Chapter since 2006, 9 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators

Alpena: Chapter since 2005, 45 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, volunteered with historic restoration, sponsored Christmas Parade, Antiques Fair, and Smokin’ the Pass BBQ contest, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, participated in Ozark By-ways planning and events, Step Up for Public Schools walk, contacted legislators, alpenapass.org



Alzheimer-Dollarway: Chapter since 2006, 48 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, hosted legislators at event, volunteered at community events, participated in parent engagement group, submitted newspaper articles, organized community group for planning RCA/ForwARd Community School

Arkansas City: Chapter since 2012, 29 members, volunteered at community events, member of Delta Highways revitalization network, community food pantry, attended city council meetings, submitted articles to newspaper, historic preservation project, arkansascityusa.com

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, 93 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, community website, community Facebook page, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in rural economic development regional planning, shared information about public schools on social media, participated in merchants group, applied for a grant, participated in training, contacted legislators



Bruno-Pyatt: Chapter since 2005, 42 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, produced heritage festival, contacted legislators, Grants in Place grant

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

Carlisle: Chapter since 2005, 16 members, contacted legislators, merchants group hosted RCA presentation

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

Concord-Ida: Chapter since 2012, 8 members, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, Public School by Choice advocacy team, shared social media posts about public education

Deer: Chapter since 2016, 27 members, attended youth advocacy day, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, participated in education event

Delight: Chapter since 2005, 121 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, Partnership Giving project, participated in rural economic development planning meeting, historic preservation, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, participated in Public School by Choice campaign



Dermott: Chapter since 2008, 103 members, attended RCA conference, 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 dermott.org, community Facebook page, organized community group for planning RCA/ForwARd Community School, attended RCA rural economic development planning event, shared social media posts about public education, helped with tutoring program, youth development, participated in training, applied for a grant

Des Arc: Chapter since 2005, 20 members, attended RCA conference, Imagination Library project, contacted legislators, shared social media posts about public education

Diamond City: Chapter since 2006, 12 members, added new 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, submitted newspaper articles, contacted legislators, helped with tutoring program, promoted youth development, participated in millage campaign, historic preservation project, Facebook page, diamondcityar.org

Doddridge: Chapter since 2012, 110 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at community event, 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 planning event, submitted newspaper article, Step Up for Public Schools walk, Public School by Choice, shared social media posts about public education



Earle: Chapter since 2009, 7 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in community event, participated in historic preservation, attended RCA conference, participated in civic engagement project, participated in youth network, contacted legislators, Grants in Place project, hosted parades/open house/festivals, members participated in training, attended city council meetings, participated in millage campaign, helped with tutoring program, submitted newspaper articles, participate in Public School by Choice, shared social media posts about public education

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

Elaine: Chapter since 2006, 67 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 Facebook page, attended city council meetings, submitted articles for newspaper, 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, AR-GLR activities, shared social media posts about public education

Eudora: Chapter since 2005, 92 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, submitted newspaper articles, youth development, merchants group, attended city council meetings, attended RCA rural economic development planning, Giving Tree grant eudoraar.org

Fairfield Bay: Chapter since 2014, 32 members, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, produced community events, community website visitfairfieldbay.com, attended city council meetings, participated in RCA regional planning, attended RCA conference, applied for grant, contacted legislators, submitted newspaper articles

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, 16 members, added new members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, community website, community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, community festival, contacted legislators

Fourche Valley: Chapter since 2009, 53 members, organized alumni reunion, volunteered at community events, raised money for community projects, 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, contacted legislators

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, attended legislative committee hearings

Hughes: Chapter since 2014, 35 members, sent members to RCA conference, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, organized a community event, conducted a community improvement project, attended city council meetings, helped with tutoring program, submitted newspaper articles, applied for grant, historic preservation project, hosted parade/open house/festival, participated in a training, contacted legislators, youth development program, Public School by Choice campaign, social media posts about public education

Jasper: Emerging chapter, 2 members, community website theozarkmountains.com, held community festivals and events, contacted legislators, attended education event

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

Lafayette County: Chapter since 2012, 31 members, volunteered at community events, volunteered at school, participated in school board election, contacted legislators, participated in economic development activities, attended RCA rural economic development regional planning, community garden, applied for grant for community improvement, merchants group, attended city council meetings, youth development program, tutoring program

Lead Hill: Chapter since 2006, 23 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, Public School by Choice campaign, millage campaign, participated in training, helped with tutoring program, hosted legislators 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, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, 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 city council meetings, Forward Community Schools strategic planning, applied for grant, participated in merchants group, participated in school board elections, promoted youth development, tutoring program, summer learning camp, shared social media posts about public education.



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, historic preservation, developed community projects, participated in developing regional project, hosted parades and festivals, historic preservation, contacted legislators, youth development programs, tutoring program, Ancestor Fair, Hattie House after school program, marshallar.org

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

McNeil: Chapter since 2016, 5 members, members volunteered at school, members organized/volunteered at community events, community improvement project, historic preservation, participated in RCA rural economic development regional planning, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, tutoring program, submitted newspaper articles

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, contacted legislators

Mt. Judea: Chapter since 2011, 47 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, mtjudea.org, participated in Partnership Giving initiative, organized artists and artisans coop, historic preservation, Arkansas Quilt Trails, AR-GLR activities, started community library



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, attended City Council meetings, historic preservation cityofnorfolk.org



Oden: Chapter since 2005, 24 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, 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, 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, applied for grant, participated in training, attended Quorum Court meetings, submitted newspaper articles, shared social media posts about public education



Plainview-Rover: Chapter since 2005, 58 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, hosted fall festival, participated in merchants group, attended city council meetings

Poyen: Chapter since 2005, 31 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, historic preservation, youth development projects, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, community Facebook page

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

Romance-Floyd: New chapter, 5 members, added new members, organized community event, applied for a grant

Rose Bud: New chapter, 15 members, worked on community project, attended city council meetings, attended RCA summer conference, economic development training, applied for grant, historic preservation, contacted legislators, participated in Step Up for Public Schools and Public School by Choice, shared social media posts about public education, hosted RCA conference, built veterans' memorial

Rural Special: Chapter since 2005, 129 members, added new members, volunteered at school, participated in Public School by Choice, contacted legislators, school foundation, Ozark Byways revitalization project, YouTube.com/FoxArkansas, volunteered at community events, Veterans Day event, attended RCA conference, attended Arkansas Grade-Level Reading events, linked to Ozark Byways website, volunteered at community event, historic preservation, community Facebook page, 4th of July Celebration, community beautification, submitted articles for newspaper, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Arkansas and Stone County Quilt Trails

Shirley: Chapter since 2013, 23 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, shirleyarkansas.org, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, historic preservation, community beautification, contacted legislators, 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, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, participated in education event, historic preservation, community revitalization, attended city council meetings, attended RCA summer conference, attended RCA rural economic regional planning, Step Up for Public Schools walk, Public School by Choice campaign

St. Joe: Chapter since 2009, 43 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, historic preservation project, 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, stjoearkansas.org

Timbo: Chapter since 2007, 19 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, participated in Ozark Byways Buy-Days

Turrell: Chapter since 2006, 17 members



Valley Springs: Chapter since 2005, 171 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 as part of AR-GLR, participated in Public School by Choice, participated in millage campaign, youth development program, submitted newspaper articles, valleyspringsar.org



Waldo: Chapter since 2012, 26 members, added new members, attended city council meetings, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspapers, contacted legislators, participated in training, helped with tutoring program, attended RCA summer conference, attended RCA rural economic development regional planning, Step Up for Public Schools, summer learning camp

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,

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 RCA conference, volunteered at school, hosted festival, volunteered at community event, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, participated in regional revitalization network, organized community events, youth development project, tutoring program, submitted newspaper articles, shared social media posts about public education

Witts Springs: Chapter since 2014, 32 members, added new members, volunteered at community events, community festivals and parades, community Facebook page, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, historic preservation, farmers market, members participated in training, submitted newspaper articles, Pedestal Rock 40 bike ride, helped develop regional project, Witts Springs Community Voices, contacted legislators, wittssprings.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 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**
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. 2,199 members in 67 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 2,200 members in 67 chapters and trained over 1,200 rural leaders.

Rural People Working Together

Education Youth Development Community Revitalization Policy Development

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

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