



Annual Progress Report

2009

Rural Community Alliance

Our 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 rural 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.

Our 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 life style 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.

Our History



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 in 2003 to resist a massive school consolidation plan that would have eliminated every Arkansas school district with fewer than 1,500 students. The state wide 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.



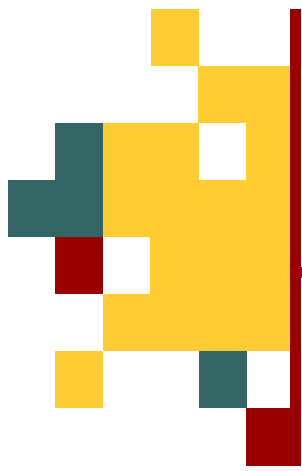
Advocates for Community and Rural Education (ACRE). Following the 2003 regular and special sessions of the Arkansas Legislature (which lasted into April of 2004), rural education advocates realized that a permanent advocacy organization was needed to stand up for rural schools and students. With the 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

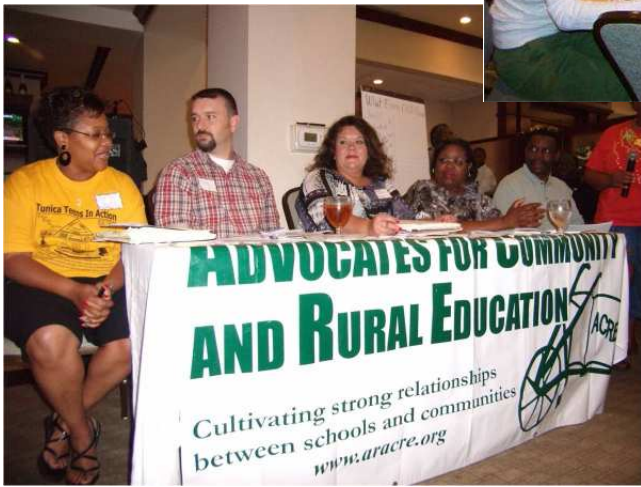
in recognition of the growing importance of this community-based work and its overarching significance for rural families, children, and schools. A membership campaign in late 2009 increased the membership base of Rural Community Alliance to over 1,000 members in more than 45 communities. As we move into a new year and 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.”



2009 Events



ACRE Annual Summer Conference, Conway, AR, July 2009. Group discussion of ways to improve quality of life and place in rural communities.



Annual conference: Left, panel discussion of what communities owe kids; right, the Eckert boys take a pool break!



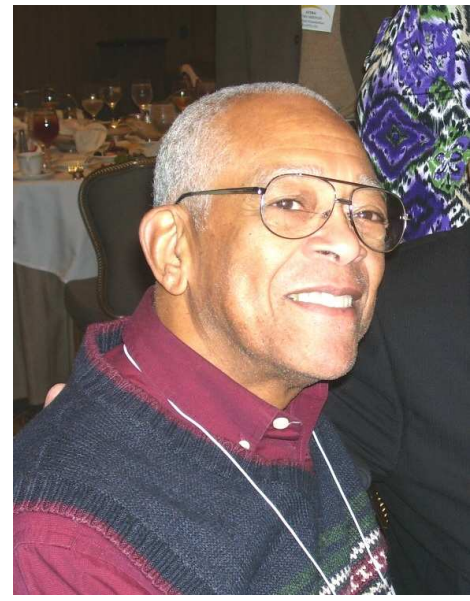
Rural School and Community Trust Rural Education Working Group 2009 at Hendersonville, NC, in April. From left, storyteller Barbara Armstrong White; Handmade in America founder Becky Armstrong; and Bo Taylor, archivist at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian near Cherokee, NC.



Lead organizer Dorothy Singleton gets President Clinton's autograph at the Council on Foundations' Rural Philanthropy Conference at Little Rock in July.



Rural Community Alliance staff, with Richard and Penny Harris and Lester Grandon, at the Schott Foundation's Opportunity to Learn conference in Washington, DC, in November.



In **March 2009** our staff received valuable training from Brenda Hyde and Leroy Johnson of **Southern Echo, Inc., in Jackson, MS**, as part of the Southern Echo Grassroots Community Organizing Initiative, an Organizing Communities Grant Program of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. In **November**, Dorothy was privileged to be present when Southern Echo received the Social Justice Leadership Award for Freedom at the Southern Partners' Fund Social Justice Institute awards dinner and gala in Atlanta, accepted by president and veteran Civil Rights activist, Hollis Watkins.

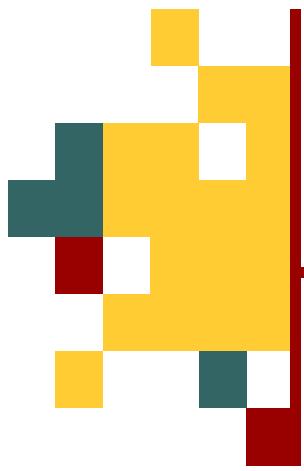


Rural Community Alliance members Melanie and Linda Yelder attended the Marguerite Casey Foundation's **Equal Voice Campaign convening in San Francisco** with Dorothy Singleton in **September 2009**.

Friends from home in faraway places: Renee Carr and Lavina Grandon met these school board members from Stephens when they conducted a workshop with RSCT's Rachel Thompkins at the **National School Boards Association convention in San Diego in April 2009**.



Dorothy met two great Civil Rights icons in her travels in 2009. Left, the Reverend Dr. Joseph Lowery, keynote speaker at **Southern Partners Fund's 10th Annual Awards Dinner and Gala in Atlanta, GA, in November**, and right, Minnie Jean Brown-Tricke of the Little Rock Nine, encountered at an event at **Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center in Marvell, AR**.



Programs

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.

Local Actions

At the local level, members run candidates for school board and campaign for millage increases, run tutoring programs and volunteer in classrooms and at school activities. In this picture, a 2008 millage campaign by the Bismarck chapter resulted in funding to both get the school off fiscal distress and to build a new high school **in 2009**. For other local actions by chapter members, see the Chapter Report at the end of this booklet.



Legislative Campaign

The **2009 legislative session** provided an opportunity to display Rural Community Alliance members' ability to mobilize in support of their schools. At the urging of Rural Community Alliance constituents, legislators Randy Stewart, Larry Teague, and Buddy Lovell each sponsored bills that would have limited the power of Act 60 to close schools. Due to powerful lobbying by the governor's office and the state Department of Education, none of the bills became law, but thousands of contacts by RCA members resulted in a bill to require that a district fall below the minimum enrollment in all four quarters of a given year being passed by the House by a vote of 89-8 before being killed in the Senate Education Committee. With the Rural School and Community Trust, Rural Community Alliance produced a report showing rural school districts' financial disadvantage in transportation funding. Members successfully advocated for necessary funding to allow isolated schools and districts to operate.



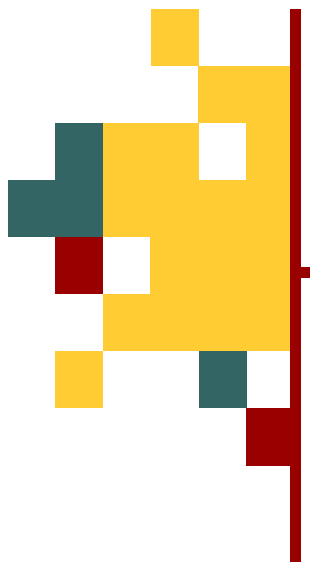
National and Regional Efforts

In **2009** Rural Community Alliance took the first steps toward participating in important national campaigns: The Rural School and Community Trust's Formula Fairness Campaign and the Schott Foundation's National Opportunity to Learn campaign. Regionally, the organization remained involved with the RSCT's Rural Education Policy Collaborative of six southern states.



SmartEdge Financial Literacy Training

Rural Community Alliance offered a valuable new service to rural schools and communities **in 2009**—financial literacy training with SmartEdge by GMAC. In the past year RCA staff and community trainers have provided classes in budget and credit, mortgage financing, banking and insurance, and auto financing to over two thousand rural youth and community members. Training and materials are provided free of cost as a community service of GMAC.



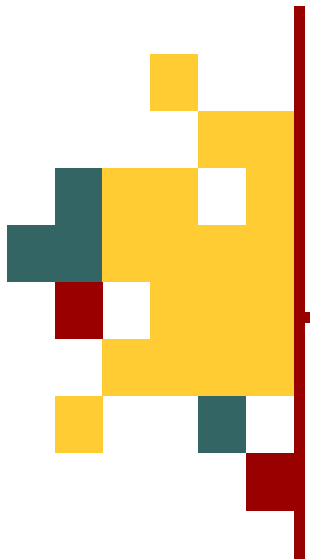
Programs

Youth Development

The Rural Community Alliance Youth Development Initiative seeks to provide rural youth with experiences that will make them more educated, prosperous, and aware citizens through service projects, entrepreneurship training and seed money, and youth philanthropy projects.

In 2009 Rural Community Alliance provided entrepreneurship training for 30 youth ages 13 to 25 and seed money for six individuals for micro-enterprises. Youth have participated in community revitalization meetings and focus groups at all five locations.

Pictures: Top, entrepreneurship training at Delight. Bottom, youth focus group at Eudora.



Programs

Policy Development

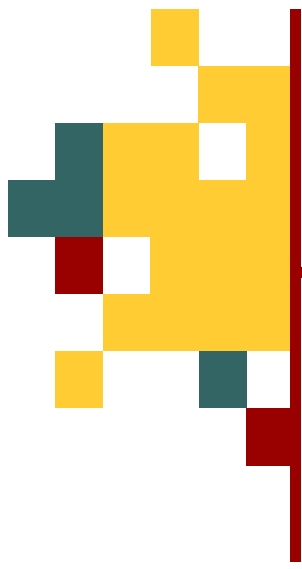
Rural Community Alliance engages members in a collaborative process to identify state and local policies that would favorably impact rural schools and communities. Organization staff develops materials for members to effectively convey their beliefs and priorities to policy makers.

Policy priorities identified by members for the **2009 legislative session** were as follows:

- Stop school consolidation
- Adequate funding for rural schools
- Economic development for rural areas
- Youth enterprise grants
- Rural broadband
- Update vocational training
- Elect State Board of Education
- Rural Transportation services

Pictures: Top, Rep. John Burriss. Bottom, members identify policy issues.





Programs

Community Revitalization: Delight



The Delight chapter of Rural Community Alliance participated in a Rural Community Revitalization project which resulted in a strategic plan for the community in **May of 2009**.

The plan was the culmination of two community forums and eight months of work by committees and focus groups in Education, Natural Resources, Economic Development, City Beautification, and Arts & Heritage. A total of 56 community members worked on developing the plan.

For the rest of 2009, the community worked on developing the projects in the strategic plan. The results of their work are summarized below.

NATURAL RESOURCES: Planning is in progress for a walking trail and developing awareness projects around a buzzard roost habitat and artesian wells.

CITY BEAUTIFICATION: Held city-wide cleanup, painted business facades to make downtown more attractive, planted flowers in containers to beautify downtown, made new signs for all entrances to the city, developed and maintained a courtyard in a vacant lot downtown.



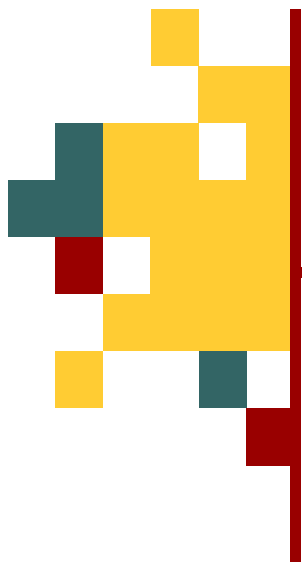
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Created a farmer's market, promoted two concerts to bring people into town, developing a website, submitted a grant application for a heritage music festival, working with the city to acquire property adjacent to the park for a grandstand, working to obtain a vacant building to house information center, gift shop, and Glen Campbell museum, organized Christmas parades in 2008 and 2009.

ARTS & HERITAGE: Held several fundraisers for restoration of Rosenwald School, submitted grant applications for Rosenwald School restoration project, working on 501c3 status.



EDUCATION: Held numerous meetings to get community input on planned consolidation/annexation of Delight school, conducted prayer walk around school, conducted lobbying campaign to amend Arkansas Act 60.

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Rural Community Alliance trained five community members in grant writing and provided entrepreneurship training to eight youth.



Programs

Community Revitalization: Leslie



The Leslie strategic plan was finalized in **May 2009** after six months of meetings by committees and focus groups in Education, Environment, Community Services, City Beautification, Economic Development, and Arts & Heritage. Picture: Sarah Timothy presenting recommendations of City Beautification group to the community

Seventy-eight community members participated in the planning process. Through the remainder of 2009, focus groups began developing the projects outlined in their strategic plan. Following are the results of their work through December 2009:

ENVIRONMENT: Started recycling project, planted wildflowers, set up community garden, gave away native trees, toured botanical gardens in Fayetteville to get ideas for plantings in Leslie.

CITY BEAUTIFICATION: Planted flower containers on city sidewalks, developed plan to put decorative themed banners on street lights, conducted city-wide cleanup and fence painting project, new sign promoting Leslie at junction of Highways 65 and 66, decorated streets and park for Christmas.

ARTS & HERITAGE: Established farmer's and craft market which operated throughout the summer, produced Stewards of the Earth Festival with Arkansas Heritage Grant, created booklet of historic structures, Facebook page, fundraisers for Ozarks Heritage Arts Center and Museum, Old Fashioned Christmas community fair with business open house, wagon rides, caroling in the park, native arts and crafts, etc. Picture: Ryan Cloud, Karen Lafargue, and Adrienne Lafargue manning Arts & Heritage booth at Old Fashioned Christmas



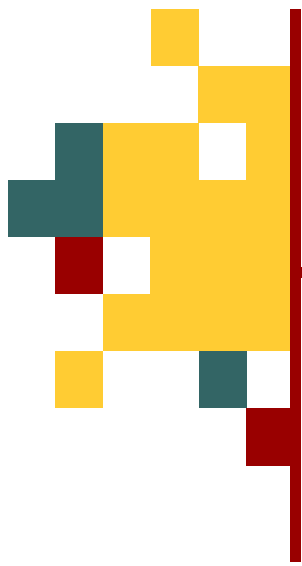
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Formed Merchants Association, planning website, planning shop local campaign, worked with A&H group on Christmas fair—merchants offered discounts and free refreshments, Hospitality Fair by Dept. of Parks & Tourism, dilapidated buildings removed, five store fronts being renovated, new gas station/convenience store being built, new restaurant, new real estate office, new art gallery. Picture: Wagon rides at Christmas Fair



EDUCATION: Submitted letter of intent for charter school, secured \$25,000 for North Arkansas College satellite classes to be held at Career Center.

COMMUNITY SERVICES: Submitted \$45,000 grant for Fun Park, working with NWAEDD on \$250,000 grant to refurbish Community Center, submitted grant to Department of Rural Services to remodel and expand City Hall.

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Rural Community Alliance trained six people in grant writing.



Programs

Community Revitalization: Eudora



The Eudora Community Revitalization Project started with a planning/survey committee meeting in December of 2008. The following eight months of community forums and focus group meetings resulted in a strategic plan being finalized in **July 2009**.

Fifty-nine community members participated in the focus groups which made recommendations for the strategic plan. From **July through December of 2009**, the Eudora Community Revitalization Project reports the following progress:

CITY BEAUTIFICATION/COMMUNITY SERVICES: Held city-wide cleanup, placed planters with flowers downtown, tore down two burned out/abandoned buildings, obtained three acres for community garden and donated seed, scheduled meeting with UAPB faculty members to get assistance with Heifer grant for garden, scheduled 2010 clean-up day, scheduled UAPB services fair.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Two enterprise trainings to 30 young people ages 13-25, five youth enterprise grants to six young people, established website for Eudora Reunion, working on authorization for weekend flea market and farmer's market in Fairgrounds, participating in planning for community clean-up. Picture: Project Leader Erma Toney presenting Steve Williams with start-up check for his mobile car detailing business



ARTS & HERITAGE: Identified location of nearby Indian mounds, checked with museum in nearby Epps, LA, about a similar mound and how it is being incorporated into the museum, participating in the community wide clean-up.

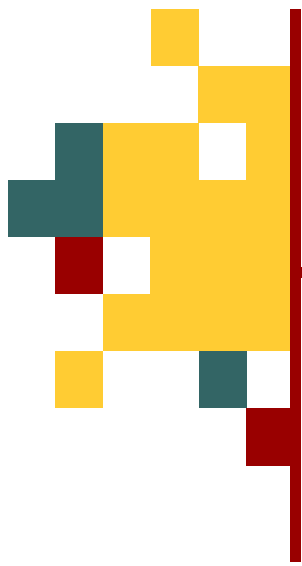
EDUCATION: Holding planning meetings for resubmitting charter school application, Lakeside School District has donated a building to the city which can be used for charter school, scheduled meeting with Al Lockett of Learning4Today to get help with charter school application.

NATURAL RESOURCES: Cleaned pond in city park.

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Rural Community Alliance partnered with Southern Echo to provide leadership training to 10 youth and adults. Rural Community Alliance provided a two-day grant writing class to 10 people.

Picture: Left, Marilyn Young of Tunica Teens in Action and, right, Brenda Hyde, Assistant Director of Southern Echo, Inc., of Jackson, Mississippi





Programs

Community Revitalization: Dermott

"Striving to be a thriving oasis that welcomes all" is the aim of Dermott's Community Revitalization Project.



The Dermott Rural Community Alliance chapter began the revitalization project with business and community surveys in **July and August 2009**.

The Community Forum for Assessment was held on **September 15, 2009**, followed by two months of focus group meetings.

Fifty-two community members participated in focus group meetings on Education, Agriculture/Natural Resources, Community Services, City Beautification, Economic Development, and Arts & Heritage/Youth Development.



The community met again in a Community Forum for Visioning and Planning on **November 10, 2009**, to vote on and prioritize recommendations of focus groups.

At this meeting, the focus groups and community voted on 25 recommendations for Dermott's strategic plan. The recommendations were to be compiled and the plan finalized in January 2010.

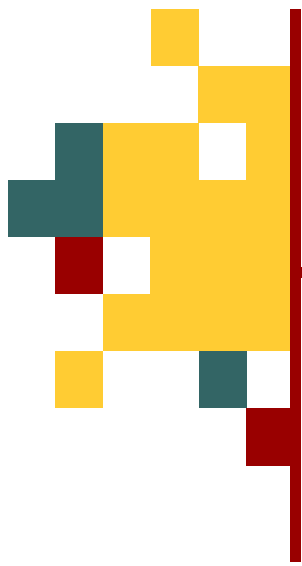


Dermott: "The Jewel of the Lower Delta"

Dermott, Arkansas, population 3733, is located in northern Chicot County near the junction of Highways 65 and 165. 73% of the population is African-American, and 27% is white. The median household income in 2008 was \$20,402.

Dermott residents have a vision for their community as a clean, positive, healthy town with activities and events for all. They want to provide enhanced educational and recreational opportunities for youth and job opportunities for everyone.

They aspire to be a thriving oasis in the southern Delta, with celebrations, cultural activities, and historic sites to enhance the quality of life and place.



Programs

Community Revitalization: Greater Lead Hill Area



Three different communities make up the Greater Lead Hill Area Community Revitalization Project, and each has its own distinct characteristics.

Lead Hill (left) was once a landing spot for steamboats on the White River. The original town was flooded by Bull Shoals Lake in the 1950's and moved to its present location. South Lead Hill (population 88) is a tiny offshoot of Lead Hill proper (population 287). Laid out along Bull Shoals Lake four miles away is the late 1950's planned community of Diamond City (population 730). Both Lead Hill and Diamond City have made efforts in the past to bring in jobs and industry, so the community has a small industrial base as well as potential for expansion of the tourist industry.

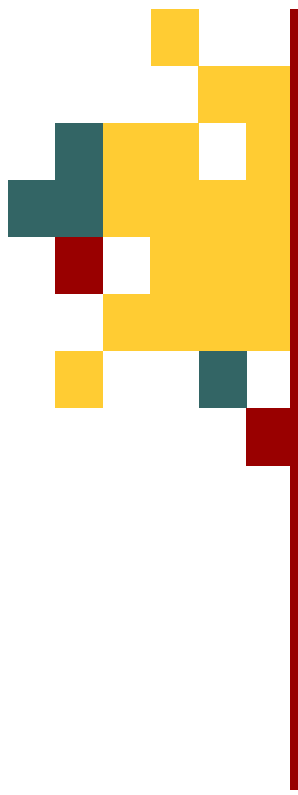


A major concern of all three communities is retaining their school, threatened with an Act 60 consolidation by its small size. Another motivation for their revitalization project is greater prosperity for the area. In spite of the area's assets and history of forward thinking, more than 70% of students in the school are eligible for free/reduced lunch.

Revitalization Schedule

- Business and Community Surveys—Sept.-Oct. 2009
- Community Forum for Assessment—Nov. 2, 2009
- Focus Groups Meet—Nov. 2009-Jan. 2010
- Community Forum for Visioning and Planning—March 2010
- Compile Strategic Plan—March 2010
- Finalize Strategic Plan and Begin Projects—March 2010





Chapter Reports

Rural Community Alliance has 1,063 members organized into 46 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 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 for 2009.

ACORN

Chapter since 2008

Members: 9

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Taught SmartEdge
- Attended school board meetings

ALPENA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 8

Activities

- Added new members
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered in community

ALTHEIMER-DOLLARWAY

Chapter since 2006

Members: 25

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in school board race
- Members working to turn old high school building into museum
- Volunteer at Altheimer Elementary
- Attended school board meetings
- Recruited new superintendent for RCA membership

BEARDEN

New Chapter

Members: 22

BISMARCK

Chapter since

Members: 16

Activities

- Taught SmartEdge
- Contacted legislators
- Wrote EAST lab grant
- Attended school board meetings
- Community economic development

BRADLEY

Chapter since 2005

Members: 84

Activities:

- Added new members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Sent members to OTL conference
- Participated in school board race
- Fundraisers: Christmas Store, Harvest Carnival, concession stand at ballgame
- Members involved in school parent involvement group
- Attended school board meetings



Bradley chapter leader Brennan Harris and husband Richard at the Schott Foundation Opportunity To Learn conference in Washington, D.C., in November 2009.

BRUNO-PYATT

Chapter since 2005

Members: 20

Activities

- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Phone/e-mail campaign to rally community support
- Anderson Flat School Preservation Project
- Frontier Days Celebration
- Benefit fundraisers
- Volunteer for youth leadership
- Attended school board meetings



Bruno-Pyatt preserves its rural heritage with its Frontier Days celebration. Here, old-time fiddler Violet Hensley with local children.

CARTHAGE

Chapter since 2006

Members: 5

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Participated in millage campaign
- Community economic development: Opened barber shop, gift shop, opening day spa in 2010
- Volunteering with youth: Teaching life skills class once a month
- Exploring charter school for empty high school building

CARLISLE

Chapter since 2005

Members: 14

Activities

- Added new members
- Added youth members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteers for school activities: Band Boosters, Booster Club, Parent Center, Student Council
- Volunteers for city-wide cleanup
- Volunteers for tornado cleanup

CENTERPOINT

Chapter since 2006

Members: 7

Activities

- Added new members
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school

DELIGHT

Chapter since 2005

Members: 52

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Community Revitalization Project
- Grant writing training
- Attended school board meetings
- Worked on Rosenwald School project and Glen Campbell Museum
- Benefit fundraisers
- Community meetings about school consolidation
- Attended Education Committee meetings at Legislature
- Incentives for host parents for exchange students
- Led community cleanup/fix-up

DELIGHT STUDENT CHAPTER

Chapter since 2005

Members: 36

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Community Revitalization Project meetings and focus groups
- Legislative Page
- SmartEdge taught
- Youth enterprise training
- Attended consolidation meetings



Delight students Dre Northcross (left) and Kylar Kelton (right) served as pages at the State Capitol for Senator Larry Teague.

PRAIRIE COUNTY (Des Arc)

Chapter since 2005

Members: 14

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Tutored students
- Attended school board meetings

DERMOTT

Chapter since 2008

Members: 63

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Community Revitalization Project
- Taught SmartEdge
- Contacted legislators
- Rosenwald School restoration
- Attended school board meetings
- Adopt-a-class at school
- Applied for heritage grant
- Participated in school board race
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteer school/community

ELAINE

Chapter since

Members: 14

Activities

- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught SmartEdge
- Participated in school board race
- Petitioned school district for abandoned school building in Elaine

Candace and Clyde Williams, Jr., from Elaine staff conference registration desk.



FOURCHE VALLEY

New Chapter

Members: 9

Activities

- Sent members to annual conference
- Attended school board meetings
- Held fundraisers for lawsuit
- Held community meetings
- Filed lawsuit to keep school open
- Participated in school board campaign

GENOA CENTRAL

Chapter since 2006

Members: 15

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Taught SmartEdge
- Added new members

HAMPTON

Emerging Chapter

Members: 5

EARLE

New Chapter

Members: 5

Activities

- Taught SmartEdge

EAST POINSETT COUNTY

New Chapter

Members: 16

EUDORA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 56

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Community Revitalization project
- Taught SmartEdge
- Youth enterprise training
- Youth enterprise grants
- Contacted legislators
- Grant writing training
- Participated in school board race
- Participated in millage campaign
- Summer nutrition program, after school program
- Volunteer clean-up in community

FRIENDS of Rural Community Alliance

Chapter since 2005

Members: 48

Activities

- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Provided technical assistance



Fourche Valley participants discuss community development at annual conference.

GUY PERKINS

New Chapter

Members: 7

HUGHES

Emerging Chapter

Members: 2

LEAD HILL

Chapter since 2006

Members: 37

Activities

- Added members
- Added youth members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Community Revitalization Project
- Contacted legislators
- Planning preservation projects
- Volunteers: Shadowing and After-school programs
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended Senate Education committee



James White visits with volunteer Peggy Massey as she checks Christmas lights in Leslie City Park.



Lead Hill chapter members are participating in a Community Revitalization Project to secure the future of their school and their children.

LESLIE

Chapter since 2006

Members: 50

Activities

- Added members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Community Revitalization Project
- Grant writing training
- Held fundraisers
- Heritage preservation events
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteers for community cleanup
- Volunteers for community events

MARIANNA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 34

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Taught SmartEdge
- Recruited school staff
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school: Lunch Buddies and reading to children
- Member started community credit union

MARKED TREE

Emerging Chapter

Members: 4

MIDLAND

Emerging Chapter

Members: 2

MINERAL SPRINGS

New Chapter

Members: 5

Activities

- Added members
- Taught SmartEdge

ODEN

Chapter since 2005

Members: 24

Activities

- Members volunteer with school activities

OMAHA

New Chapter

Members: 5

OSCEOLA

New Chapter

Members: 8

PARON

Chapter since 2006

Members: 8

Activities

- Sent members to annual conference
- Attended school board meetings
- Local community development
- Contacted legislators
- Volunteered at school
- Fundraisers and rallied support to renovate old high school building
- Paron Mayfest

PLAINVIEW-ROVER

Chapter since 2005

Members: 48

Activities

- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in school board race
- Contacted legislators
- Sent members to annual conference

POYEN

Chapter since 2005

Members: 13

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in millage campaign
- Recruited quality staff for school

Rally for RURAL SPECIAL

Chapter since 2005

Members: 59

Activities

- Added new members
- Started youth chapter
- Sent members to annual conference
- Taught SmartEdge
- Contact legislators
- Campaigned in local school board race
- Petitioned school board in favor of keeping school open
- PR Articles about school and students submitted to local paper
- Updated and republished history of school
- Community volunteers: Fox Fun Fest
- Fundraisers for PTO and school
- Solicited corporate donation for new school marquee
- Produced CD that promotes school to increase enrollment
- Volunteers helped prepare for start of school, helped with ice storm cleanup
- Volunteers decorate and clean up after school events
- Established Rural Educational Heritage, Inc., endowment to support school
- Attended school board meetings

SMACKOVER

Chapter since 2007

Members: 13

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Participated in millage campaign
- Sponsored youth volunteer program
- Attended school board meetings

TIMBO

Chapter since 2007

Members: 8

Activities

- Added new members
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in school board race
- Worked on declining enrollment
- Volunteered at school activities

RIVERCREST

New Chapter

Members: 6

RURAL SPECIAL YOUTH

New Chapter

Members: 50



Rural Special members help organize the Fox Fun Fest, their annual homecoming/heritage celebration event.

STEPHENS-MCNEILL

Emerging Chapter

Members: 5

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Sent members to annual conference
- Attended school board meetings

ST. JOE

Emerging Chapter

Members: 5

Activities

- Volunteers community cleanup
- Restoration of old railroad depot

TURRELL

Chapter since

Members: 14

Activities

- Contacted legislators
- Testified to Senate Ed Committee
- Held community meetings about school consolidation

VALLEY SPRINGS

Chapter since 2005

Members: 100

Activities

- Added members
- Added youth members
- Sent members to annual conference
- Contacted legislators
- Generated community support for legislation
- Taught SmartEdge
- Attended legislative committee meetings
- Volunteer tutoring
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in prayer walk at school
- Participated in school board race

VALLEY SPRINGS STUDENTS

Chapter since 2006

Members: 13

Activities

- Added members
- Contacted legislators
- SmartEdge
- Participated in prayer walk at school

Results of membership drive:

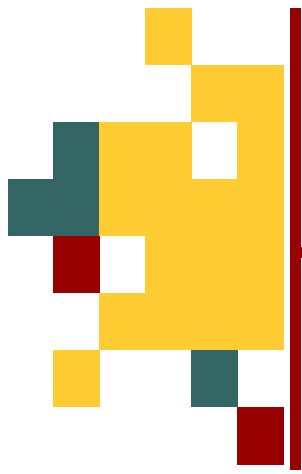
46 Chapters

1,063 Members

Special Recognition—Penny Harris

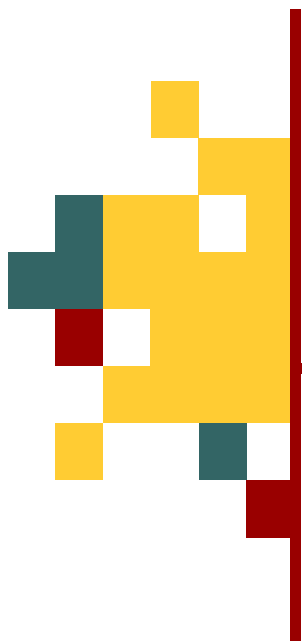
Brennan “Penny” Harris is the winner of our membership contest. Penny has been the chapter leader at Bradley since 2005. An amazing organizer, in November and December she added 48 new members to her chapter. This makes Bradley, with a population of 563 and a school enrollment of 410, the second-largest Rural Community Alliance chapter. Penny is a phlebotomist, rural relief mail carrier, and treasurer of New Hope Church. She and volunteers many hours with Extension Homemakers Club, which includes delivering meals to the elderly, and the school’s VIP (Very Important Parents) parent involvement group.





Funders and donors

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Marguerite Casey Foundation
Southern Partners Fund
General Motors Acceptance Corporation
C.S. Mott/Southern Echo, Inc.
Ben and Jerry's Foundation
Arkansas Community Development Society
Great American Insurance Co., Inc.
Arkansas Amateur Basketball Foundation
Rural Teachers of Arkansas
Buster Beardsley, Pres., F.S. Beardsley
Public Finance Company



Partners, Collaborators, Resources

National

The Rural School and Community Trust

Regional

Southern Echo, Inc. (Mississippi)
CFO Rural School Partnership (Missouri)

State

Arkansas Rural Education Association
Arkansas Community Foundation
Arkansas Department of Rural Services
Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Audubon Arkansas
Arkansas Game and Fish
Department of Arkansas Heritage
USDA Rural Development
FORGE (Financing Ozarks Rural Growth & Economy)
Regional economic development agencies

Rural Community Alliance

Our Staff

Executive Director – Renee Carr (left rear). Renee Carr is a Certified Public Accountant and is working on a Master's Degree in Community Development. Her duties include maintaining records of chapters and members, handling budget and finances, scheduling meetings and events, overseeing day-to-day operations of staff, overseeing implementation of strategic plan, and articulating mission and vision of the organization to the public.

Policy and Education Director (part time)– Lavina Grandon (center rear). Lavina Grandon is a former teacher with a Master's Degree in English. She is the founder of Rural Community Alliance and has been involved in education and community advocacy since 2003. She produces newsletters and brochures, creates organizing and advocacy packets, writes grants, and oversees formulation of policy.

Lead Organizer (part-time) – Dorothy Singleton (right front). Dorothy Singleton is a former telephone company employee who has been active in community organizing and advocacy since her retirement in 2001. She has worked and volunteered for such organizations as Arkansas Single Parents Scholarship Fund and the Arkansas Good Faith Fund. As lead organizer for Rural Community Alliance, she works with communities in south and east Arkansas and trains and mentors other Rural Community Alliance organizers and volunteers.

Organizer (part-time) – Danny Eckert (left front). Danny Eckert is a pastor and community activist who works with communities in western Arkansas. In the past he has run for school board and city alderman, and he led a successful effort to change the method of city government in Camden, Arkansas. His duties include establishing new Rural Community Alliance chapters and serving existing chapters by helping them meet local goals and carry out Rural Community Alliance's overall mission and objectives.

Organizer (part-time) - Jerome Madden (right rear). Jerome Madden joined the Rural Community Alliance staff in December 2009 as a community organizer for northeast Arkansas. Jerome lives in Lepanto, Arkansas, and has worked with youth in the area for many years as a community coach. He attended Lepanto High School (now East Poinsett County) and Arkansas State University.



Our 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. Grandon is the founder of Rural Community Alliance and 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 Altheimer, 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.



Treasurer – Kerry Cunningham. Kerry Cunningham is an educator in a rural school district 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 - Erma Brown is a retired County Administrator for 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 senior majoring in Family and Consumer Science at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Arkansas. She is from the small Delta town of Elaine, Arkansas. She has been a board member since 2007.



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.

Vice President—Reverend Thomas Scott, Jr., members were saddened by the passing of fellow Scott after a lengthy battle with cancer on man and minister who at the time of his he had his roots and worked for many years Wabaseka and Marianna. Thomas cared communities. At the time of his passing, he was ties to the town of Altheimer. He was also a served as a minister for almost 30 years, Baptist Church No. 2 in Pine Bluff and as education Baptist Church in Little Rock. After he in 2006, he and his wife, Audrey, and events. He will be greatly missed.



(1950-2009). Rural Community Alliance rural activist and board member Thomas October 9, 2009. Thomas was a business-service on the board lived in Pine Bluff, but in the rural Delta communities of very much about rural people and rural working on bringing a museum and active-dedicated worker for the Lord, having most recently at the New Jerusalem Baptist Church. Thomas was a business-director of the Gaines Street Missionary joined the Rural Community Alliance board participated in many conferences Rest in peace, Thomas.

In Memoriam

Rural People Working Together

Education

Youth Development

Community Revitalization

Policy Development

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