

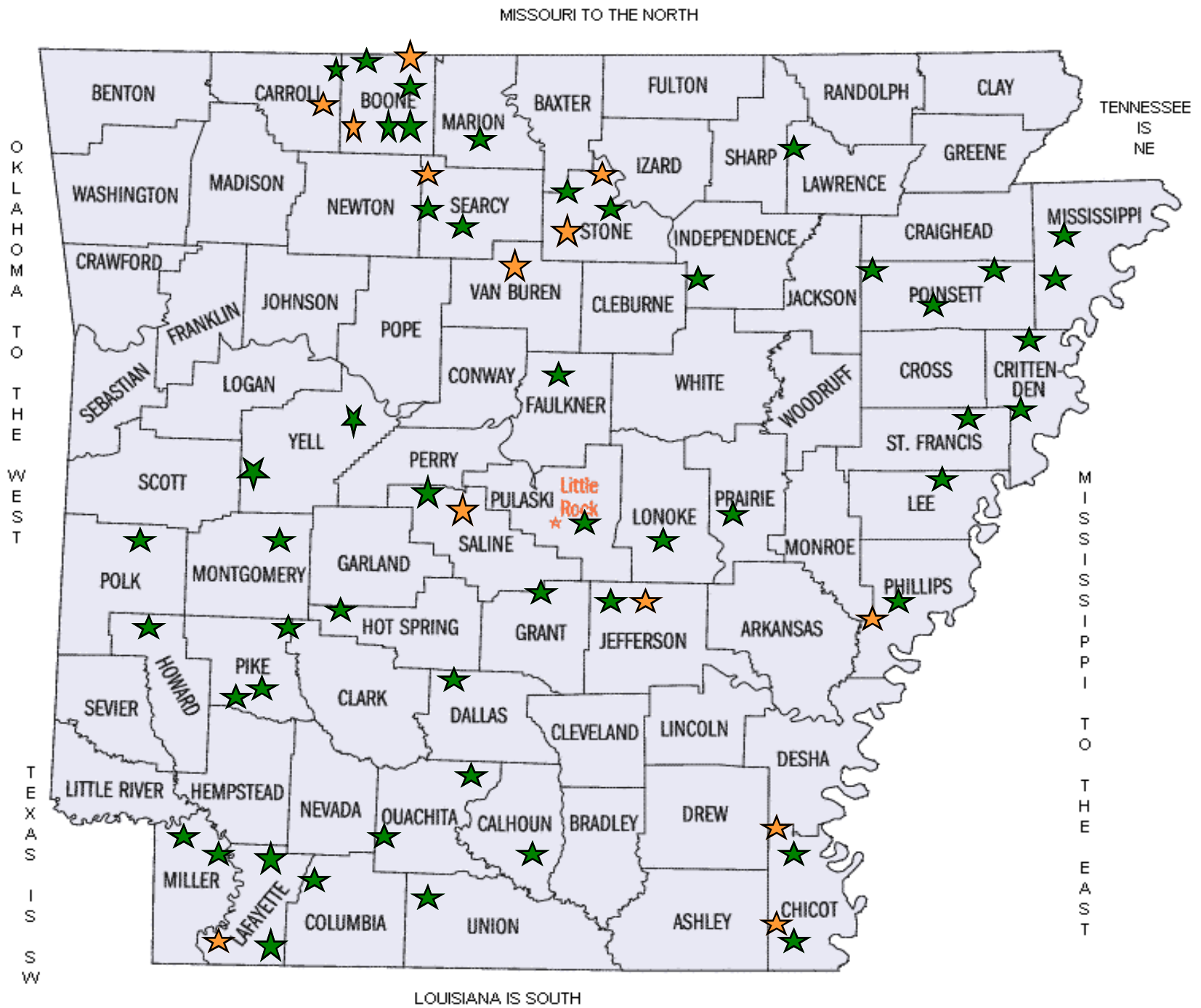
RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

2010 Annual Progress Report

*Helping rural schools and communities
survive and thrive*



Where We Are



★ Rural Community Alliance Chapter

★ Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) Project

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

Rural Community Alliance

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.

Vision

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

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

Rural Community Alliance

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 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.”



2010 Champions of Rural Arkansas

The Event

A **champion** is defined as “An ardent defender or supporter of a cause or another person; a warrior.”

Every other year, Rural Community Alliance honors **Champions of Rural Arkansas**, individuals who have selflessly given of themselves, their resources, and their talents to support the people, schools, and communities of rural Arkansas.

The 2010 cohort of Champions includes people from many different walks of life, but they have this in common: “If you’re a champion, you have it in your heart” (Chris Evert). We are truly blessed to have these friends to champion our people, our communities, and our cause.

The Champions

Don House and Dana Kelley



Former State Representative Don House (left, with wife Mary) was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award for his exceptional service during 2003-2004 legislative session. Representative House was instrumental in forming the coalition of grass-roots community members, students, educators, and rural legislators that blocked the school consolidation plan and successfully promoted many of the education reforms that are the foundation of an “equal and adequate” education in Arkansas public schools today.

Free lance writer and columnist Dana Kelley (right, with wife Kelly), the Northeast Arkansas honoree, has with his writing courageously, consistently, and effectively challenged the dominant media bias against rural people, students, and places.

Cyndi Moorman



Cyndi Moorman is a teacher from Delight who in 2003 formed the state-wide on-line group ACURE (Arkansas Communities Uniting for Results in Education) to advocate for rural students and schools. She was a founding board member of ACRE (now Rural Community Alliance) and produced an important white paper, *From Punishment to Partnership*, about the 2003-04 education reforms.

Talitha Hardin

Talitha Hardin is a school board member, city council member, RCA chapter leader and revitalization project leader from Leslie in Northwest Arkansas. A small business owner and mother of two, she spends countless hours serving her school and community and has been the guiding force in Leslie’s very successful revitalization project.



Juanita Weston Burton



Juanita Burton, a retired educator from Eudora in Southeast Arkansas, has actively advocated for quality education as a member of Rural Community Alliance since 2005. Her lifetime of service to the children of her community includes founding a non-profit to provide tutoring and summer nutrition to children, Single Parents Scholarship Fund, the Women’s Project, NAACP, Boy Scouts, regional development work, teen pregnancy prevention work, and voter registration work.

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Ron Crawford



Ron Crawford is a successful businessman from Central Arkansas who has contributed a lifetime of service to rural youth in his AAU basketball programs. He has supported the work of Rural Community Alliance with his time, talents, and resources because he has a heart for children and a heart for rural Arkansas.

2010 Events

Monticello Training



In March RCA staff and about 40 community members from Eudora, Dermott, Delight, and Leslie participated in Organizing for Comprehensive Community Change training by Garland Yates of Mobilizing Communities in partnership with the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Mott Gathering



Danny Eckert, Dorothy Singleton, Renee Carr, Juanita Burton, and Rather Clark participated in advocacy and organizer training at the C.S.Mott Foundation in Chicago in June. The event wound up a 5 year grant cycle with Mott through Southern Echo, Inc.

Summer Conference



The annual RCA Summer Conference gave 100 members the opportunity to share the work being done in their communities and formulate policy goals while learning from experts Garland Yates, Gary Funk, Marty Strange, and Karen Hayes about education and community issues.

The Summit



Reconnecting with an old ally at the Department of Volunteerism Summit in April, Lavina Grandon reminisces with former state Senator Steve Jones, now DHS Director, about fighting together for adequacy, equity, and rural schools in 2003.

OTL Conference



Renee, Dorothy, and Lavina pose with Schott Foundation Senior Vice President Cassie Schwerner at the Hot Schott Awards Gala in Chicago in September. The event capped off a one-day conference/training on messaging our Opportunity to Learn Campaign.

Southern Echo



Dorothy Singleton and Juanita Burton visit with Southern Echo Executive Director LeRoy Johnson at the final event in Southern Echo's five-year technical assistance/community organizing grant program through the Mott Foundation.

2010 Events

MCF Equal Voice



Rural Community Alliance President Lavina Grandon visits with Luz Vega-Marquis, President and CEO of the Marguerite Casey Foundation, at their annual Equal Voice for America's Families event in Chicago in September.

SEF Internship



For the first time Rural Community Alliance was invited to be part of Southern Education Foundation's summer internship program. Jayma Roten was trained by SEF and began working with RCA youth, like these in the Bradley Youth Empowerment Network (YEN) group.

Moving the Needle



Community activists participated in a conversation at the Pine Bluff Convention Center in September about creating more prosperous communities. The event was part of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation's Moving the Needle Campaign to reduce poverty in Arkansas.

Policy Council



Southern Echo's Marilyn Young, Hollis Watkins, and Brenda Hyde provided training on confronting power at the RCA Policy Council in October. This event focused on preparing for the 2011 legislative session, the Formula Fairness Campaign, and OTL Campaign.

OTL SUMMIT



Schott Foundation President Dr. John Jackson speaks of closing opportunity gaps for America's children at the first Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Summit in November. Rural Community Alliance is a partner in the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn campaign.

SPF Gathering



Dorothy Singleton participated in the Annual Southern Partners Fund gathering, held this year in September in Atlanta. Southern Partners Fund is a foundation that serves communities and organizations seeking social, economic, and environmental justice.

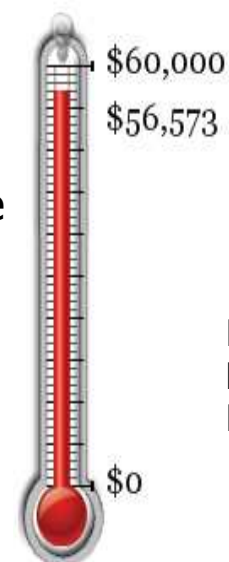
Education

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, Rural Community Alliance members run candidates for school board and campaign for millage increases, run tutoring programs and volunteer in classrooms and at school activities. At Fox in Stone County, members have formed a school foundation called Rural Education Heritage, Inc., to support and preserve education in their isolated rural area. The graphic at right shows progress on matching a \$30,000 gift donated in honor of a former resident. **In 2010** REH donated \$1,200 to the Mtn. View School District to purchase new ceiling tiles for Rural Special School. Community volunteers and local youth did the installation (pictured right).

RCA staff provided free web development and e-commerce training to community members in Alpena, Valley Springs, and Lead Hill. RCA also assisted three Arkansas applicants with i3 grant proposals, the Dermott community with a Promise Neighborhoods grant proposal, and Dermott and Eudora Elementary schools with Annenberg School Fund grant applications. For other local actions, see the Chapter Reports at the end of this booklet.



Rural Education Heritage, Inc. Fundraising goal

National Campaigns



The **Formula Fairness Campaign** (www.formulafairness.com) is a national effort led by the Rural School and Community Trust to end discrimination against rural and small schools in the federal formula for distributing Title I funding for students in poverty. **In 2010** Rural Community Alliance actively participated in the campaign by sponsoring a presentation by RSCT Policy Director Marty Strange at the RCA summer conference and at the Arkansas Rural Education Association summer conference; producing materials for members, educators, and legislators about how the Title I funding formula costs Arkansas school districts nearly five million dollars; encouraging people to sign the Formula Fairness Petition; and contacting each Arkansas Senator and Congressman about formula fairness.



The **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign** (www.otlsummit.org) is a part of the national Opportunity to Learn Campaign led by the Schott Foundation for Education. Rural Community Alliance is one of several partners in Arkansas working on this effort to close opportunity gaps for students in public schools, thus closing achievement gaps and decreasing drop-out rates. **In 2010** RCA staff attended the national Opportunity to Learn conference in Chicago and participated in the Arkansas OTL Steering Committee to help plan and produce the state's first Opportunity to Learn Summit in November.

SmartEdge Financial Literacy Training

Continuing a project begun in 2009, **in 2010** Rural Community Alliance staff taught financial literacy to 1,200 rural youth and community members. Materials were provided as a community service through the SmartEdge program of GMAC, now Ally Financial (www.smartedgebygmac.com)

Southern Education Foundation

For the first time **in 2010** Rural Community Alliance was invited to participate in the SEF summer internship program and gained the services of youth organizer Jayma Roten (www.sefatl.org)

Youth Development

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

When funds are available, RCA provides entrepreneurship training and offers small micro-enterprise grants to rural youth. **In 2010** one youth enterprise grant was awarded to Tiffany Fry, a fifth grader at Lead Hill (pictured right), to expand her commercial rabbit growing operation.



Also **in 2010** with funding from the Ben & Jerry's Foundation, Rural Community Alliance formed a Youth Empowerment Network (YEN), to teach rural young people the satisfaction and power of youth-driven philanthropy. A YEN is a youth-led service group intended to address needs in the local school and community. Unlike traditional "community service," the YENs give *students* the leadership and decision-making roles in projects that will benefit their own schools and communities.

The goals of the Youth Empowerment Network are for students to:

- Grow to love their communities even more.
- See the importance of serving others and putting others before self.
- Recognize the value of the rural way of life and the need to protect it.

Rural Community Alliance makes available to each YEN \$500, which members are urged to consider a challenge grant to complete a project and to leverage more funds. Students are encouraged to contact local businesses, banks, and organizations that might 'match' funds, thus increasing their ability to 'grant' to others and perform projects. RCA also provides a fiscal structure for receiving and expending funds and training in creating a website.

Students are asked to think of projects that can have lasting impact on their schools and communities. YENs have the opportunity to alter the course of their community's future. We challenge the students to think beyond 'today' and imagine how the projects they do could impact the lives of those much younger than themselves. The YEN provides the students with the privilege and opportunity of leaving behind a legacy.

In 2010 Rural Community Alliance established YENs in nine communities across the state, including **Elaine, Eudora, Dermott, Alpena, Bradley, Lead Hill, Paron, St. Joe, and Valley Springs**. In 2011 the program will expand to projects at Rural Special, Shirley, and Dollarway.



Left to right: (1) Youth organizer Jayma Roten meets with Bradley youth and adult sponsors. (2) Jayma discusses Valley Springs YEN with President Haley Markle and sponsor Jessica Helams. (3) Arvest Bank employee Connie Blevins presents a match of \$200 to the Lead Hill Youth Empowerment Network.

Policy Development

At the annual summer conference, 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 and provides information to members to allow them to act in a timely manner to affect state, local, and national policy.

In 2010 members were able to participate in national education policy making with the **Formula Fairness Campaign** and become part of a national movement around education policy in the **Opportunity to Learn Campaign**.

In October 2010 RCA held a Policy Council for chapter leaders to educate them on the Formula Fairness issue and train them on how to affect legislation on the state and national level.

RCA POLICY PRIORITY ISSUES FOR 2010

Community Development Issues

1. **Require school districts to return unused buildings in consolidated schools to their communities.**
2. **Funding for rural youth development.**
3. **Funding for small communities for arts, arts education, and heritage projects.**
4. **Funding for the Department of Rural Services for rural community development.**
5. **Initiative to identify appropriate industries and allocate support resources for rural economic development.**

Education Issues

1. **Limit length of bus rides.**
2. **Amend Act 60 to reduce number of school being consolidated.**
3. **Preserve funding for isolated schools.**
4. **Look at more equitable funding formula.**
5. **Support distance learning.**
6. **Study ways to make vocational education more relevant to economic development**

Photo Gallery: RCA Members identify policy issues and practice taking action



Lester and Penny practice using advocacy materials.



Renee and Mr. Mohammed sign FFC on-line petition.



Even legislative training has its lighter side!



Marilyn and Mel coach participants on how to confront power.



It's important to tell our stories.



Community Revitalization



Delight

In order to effect significant, long-term change, the Delight revitalization group formed the South East Pike County Alliance (SEPCA), a community development corporation designed to serve communities within the boundaries of the former Delight School District.

Leaders of the group attended a South Arkansas training event called Organizing for Community Change, presented by Rural Community Alliance, Garland Yates of Mobilizing Communities, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

In early 2010 SEPCA members were rewarded for their efforts when Delight was designated as a Tree City USA, an indication of their dedication to preserving the beautiful trees around Delight.

In 2010 the Arts and Heritage focus group completed one of its goals—to document the history of the Rosenwald School at Antoine. RCA assisted the group with applying for a Heritage Month grant from Arkansas Department of Heritage. The Rosenwald School group published a booklet with photos and information about the school. The grant paid for printing, which was done locally in Delight. The grant also provided some funding for a festival in May, celebrating the musical heritage of Delight and surrounding communities.

SEPCA is near completion on one of the Economic Development focus group goals of building a performance stage. The group has leased the city park and constructed a large stage, purchased stage lights, and now are working on getting a roof over it and a ramp built. Randy Abbot, leader of the Alliance's efforts, says, "it's a group effort." Project leader Carole Hale continues to document the progress of the community through photography and news articles, with Etta Teeter preserving the history of their accomplishments in a scrapbook.

The group hosted the first annual South East Pike County Alliance Music Fest in 2010, and plans are under way for the second annual event to be held September 30-October 1, 2011. The event showcases the musical heritage of the Delight area as well as attracting bands from all over Arkansas and beyond. The first inductee into the Hall of Fame will be announced at the event. Through financing provided by a member, SEPCA has purchased a lot adjoining the city park that will be used to construct a Glen Campbell Museum, a significant step toward accomplishing another of their economic development goals. Future goals are to purchase the city park property and eventually build an indoor performance theater to add to the complex.

In addition to these economic development activities, members took an active role in making the forced consolidation of their school district as equitable as possible. The group continues its city beautification activities and the annual Christmas Parade.

Dermott

The Dermott community finalized their strategic plan in January of 2010 and have been very active in looking for ways to grow their community. The revitalization group meets monthly with a celebration of accomplishments once every quarter.

In March focus group leaders and members participated in the Organizing for Community Change workshop provided by Rural Community Alliance, Garland Yates of Mobilizing Communities, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

The City Beautification focus group led a clean-up fix-up campaign for the downtown area and installed planters with perennial flowers and shrubs and installed a new welcome sign.

The Education focus group has been very active, instituting their Adopt-a-Classroom, Muffins for Moms, Donuts for Dads, and Do Your Best on Your Test projects. School counselor Lottie Bunn recently reported that Dermott Elementary is not on any kind of improvement or alert list and test scores are improving at the high school. During spring break residents planned a week of activities



Dermott, cont.



for the youth. A special committee has been formed to study school improvement. In June Rural Community Alliance staff assisted the revitalization group in applying for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant, which would have enabled them to develop a cradle to college and beyond continuum of community supports for children. They did not get the grant but put in a lot of foundational work which can be used to apply for other similar grants. In December Rural Community Alliance assisted the elementary school in applying for a \$100,000 Annenberg School Foundation grant for science equipment, library books and reading aids, mobile computer labs, and a place-based education training to be held in the summer of 2011.

The Economic Development focus group assisted with the annual Crawfish Festival, Santa Train and Christmas Parade, community-wide yard sale, and Fourth Thursday celebrations. A sub-group, Uptown Dermott, instituted a shop-local campaign with evening opening of businesses and events once a month. RCA member and Chamber of Commerce President Frank Henry compiled a list of employers with number of jobs available in Dermott. Another member opened a new restaurant. The U.S.D.A. presented a business entrepreneurship workshop and U.A.M. presented a hospitality and tourism workshop. A Youth Garden was started.

Several new youth and community services programs have opened, including a new York Williams Youth Development Center, and the Morris Booker Memorial College facility has been opened up for community programs, after school tutoring, and youth sports programs. A Delta Youth Empowerment Network group was formed to study wealth creation.

Leslie

In 2010 the Leslie Arts and Heritage focus group successfully completed its second season with their Ozark Mountain Market, featuring fresh produce and plants as well as local crafts and live music throughout the summer in downtown Leslie. The project has been so successful that nearby Clinton has asked the project leader Adrienne LaFargue to coordinate a Clinton Farmer's Market along the same lines. The group also held its second annual Fishing Derby in May on the banks of Cove Creek. To fund their various projects and call attention to Leslie's heritage, they offer for sale at local businesses post cards and calendars featuring scenes from years past. They have also created a Community Guide that outlines services offered to both current and new residents. The Ozarks Heritage and Arts Center received a \$40,000 grant through the Searcy County Chamber of Commerce to support operations, and the County Chamber sponsors music performances at OHAC every second Saturday of the month.



The City Beautification focus group has installed Avenue Banners and completed a city park renovation. The Natural Resources focus group continues to offer recycling in partnership with the Searcy County Judge's Office. They plan to move forward with more creek clean-up in 2011. Talitha Hardin and the Community Services group applied for and received a \$45,000 grant for a Fun Park. The Career Center was spotlighted in October as one of the state's best adult education programs.

The Leslie Merchants Association held its second annual Sugar Plum Festival in December 2010 with caroling in the park, talks with Santa, and open house for merchants. They instituted the first annual Community-Wide Yard Sale and the Old Fashioned Costume Contest at the Leslie Homecoming. They are planning new welcome signs on Highways 65 and 66. Several downtown buildings are being renovated and several new businesses have been established, including Oak Street Station, Skylark Café, Jewel West Studio, Sven's Art Studio, and John Carr Realty. Anticipated new businesses to be established in 2011 are a store featuring products hand-made in Arkansas, a restaurant, and a gift shop. Hardin initiated a grant request from USDA Rural Development that resulted in a \$200,000 grant for City Hall renovations.



Community Revitalization

Eudora

The Eudora City Beautification focus group participated in the Great American Cleanup last spring and has an on-going city-wide cleanup project, removing old cars, furniture, and abandoned buildings. They planted flowers and installed large planters around town.

The Arts and Heritage focus group is working on developing a local Indian mound to increase tourism, and the leader, Charles Meredith, is in the application stages of having it placed on the National Historic Register. The Austin White Cultural Center now has a full time director and offers Zumba dance classes, vocal training, and many other cultural enrichment activities.

Focus group leaders and members attended the Southeast Arkansas Organizing for Community Change workshop presented by Rural Community Alliance, Garland Yates of Mobilizing Communities, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

A back-to-school motivational event in September featured Dr. Danna G. Andrus (AKA "Dr. Truth") to offer words of encouragement to students, parents, and teachers. The renown of the Gloryland Pastors Choir continues to grow as they celebrated their third anniversary. Rural Community Alliance facilitated their performing at the first Opportunity to Learn Summit in Little Rock. Eudora Elementary was featured in the Arkansas Education Report of the University of Arkansas' Office for Education Policy as the #1 ranked school in the state in Benchmarks in Mathematics for 2010, #3 in the state in Benchmark Literacy, and #1 in combined Benchmark Mathematics and Literacy. They were also #1 among high poverty schools and #1 in the category Most Improved on Benchmark Literacy. In November Rural Community Alliance assisted Eudora Elementary in applying for the Annenberg School Fund grant.

In Community Services, the community has established a food bank with a grant for office equipment and food supplies. A new York Williams Youth Development Center was opened in Eudora. Project Leader Juanita Burton attended the Ford Foundation/Yellow Wood Wealth Creation workshop and helped established a Youth Empowerment Network group that studies the seven pillars of wealth creation. With a grant from U.S.D.A. several seniors' homes are under renovation.



Greater Lead Hill Area

The Greater Lead Hill Area revitalization group completed their strategic plan for the communities of Diamond City, Lead Hill, and South Lead Hill in March of 2010 and started on their projects. (Left, project leader Rodney Fry presents a copy to new Lead Hill Chamber of Commerce president Phyllis Ney.)



The City Beautification focus group secured a \$45,000 fun park grant for the community of Lead Hill. In Diamond City, the Volunteer Citizens Corps has been working on city cleanup. They are working on a beautification campaign centered around the theme of chainsaw art. They plan several examples of the art to be displayed around the community plus a new complimentary lighted sign and thematic signs at several businesses and churches as well as directional signs at City Hall.

The Ozark Mountain Regional Water Project is underway and will provide several jobs for the area. The Economic Development focus group met with Ozark Medieval Fortress personnel to identify ways of collaboration and opportunities for local micro-enterprises. The group sent a representative to a regional economic development meeting with the Institute for Economic Advancement and plans to continue that association with another meeting in March of 2011. Community members placed entries in the Explore Arkansas cookbook to give publicity to the area.

Community events in 2010 were the Hall of Fame banquet in May, the annual Fourth of July celebration, and the Good Old Days celebration and quilting workshop in September. The group

Lead Hill, continued



is now planning this September's celebration to be a Renaissance Fair, hoping to capitalize on the connection with the Ozarks Medieval Fortress and feature antiques vendors.

Both Lead Hill and Diamond City communities have received grants to upgrade their sewer systems.

The Economic Development focus group is working on bringing in new businesses, including a possible nursing home or assisted living facility. In October 2010 the group met with Rural Community Alliance and candidate Kelley Linck, now Rep. Kelley Linck (pictured left with Arts and Heritage focus group leader Joyce Anderson and Economic Development focus group leader Shari Marshall), to discuss larger economic

development the communities can join. An event to attract motorcycle riders is also planned for the fall.

Assistant Project Leader Shari Marshall ran for the position of Diamond City mayor and plans to use the position to promote economic development for the area.

In Education, a group has been formed to work on stabilizing school enrollment and promoting activities at the school. The community also has a Youth Empowerment Network group.

Alpena

The Alpena Community took their first steps toward a community revitalization project with two meetings in the fall of 2010.

To prepare for the project, chapter leader Tammy Raley (pictured right addressing group) enrolled a membership of 29 community members and held two informational community meetings with presentations on the Rural Community Alliance revitalization project. Projects members expressed interest in were economic development, community services, historic preservation, youth activities, and school-community partnerships.



A survey committee was identified with the community assessment forum scheduled for March 15, 2011.

Meanwhile, a Youth Empowerment Network group was formed through the Alpena school EAST lab to do youth philanthropy projects that benefit the school and community.

Paron

Since losing their high school to consolidation a few years ago, a few dedicated community members at Paron, led by Jamie Mullins, have been making great strides at filling the vacated buildings with activities that add real value to the community.

In 2010 Ron Crawford sealed a deal with the Bryant School District to utilize the Paron school gym for a sports program for the Paron youth. His daughter and son-in-law, Rhonda and Bruce Maxwell, got the program off to a good start. It allows the gym to be open three nights a week for children and adult activities.

Paron Mayfest was held with the participation of numerous vendors, the Paron Volunteer Fire Department, music, food, games, the Red Cross bloodmobile, a Morgan Nick booth sponsored by the Saline county Sheriff's Department, the Arkansas Game and Fish mobile aquarium, Smokey the Bear, ABATE bikers with books for the library, a booth by Heifer International, and some cars from the Corvette Club of Arkansas.

A Girl Scout troop from Benton came to Paron and painted the children's activity room and provided games and books.

Community Revitalization

Paron, continued



The group has started the process of re-purposing the old agri building that they were using as a thrift store to create a picnic pavilion. The Highway Department has given permission to allow additional parking for the building in their right-of-way. The community library that has been housed in part of the closed high school building has new carpet and shelves, and many books have been donated. Outside the library window, a butterfly garden has been started with planting to take place in the spring of 2011.

The Paron Youth Empowerment Network group (pictured above at initial meeting) began their community service by building the first picnic table for the community center.

There have been additional donations for a community kitchen and they are raising money to have the room rewired in order to safely use the equipment. To raise funds, the group has monthly breakfasts, at which they invite local businesses to set up tables to display their products at no cost.

The Rural Community Alliance chapter members at Paron are to be commended for their strong community spirit and their innovative approaches to helping their community survive and thrive.

Fourche Valley

When the RCA chapter at Fourche Valley was trying to save their school, they divided into three groups, which eventually evolved into two groups now working on different but complementary aspects of community revitalization. These groups are the Fourche Valley Community Development Association to work on economic development issues and the non-profit Fourche Valley Cultural Preservation and Restoration.

Fourche Valley people are workers, and they raised \$28,000 for legal costs in their attempt to keep their isolated school open. They appealed the school case all the way to the Arkansas Supreme Court.

The FVCPR held a Fourche Valley Reunion in October and have signed up over 100 members to their group. Their focus has been to work in tandem with the FVCDA to create jobs and obtain some of the school property back for community use. They have been successful in acquiring the former preschool building, which belonged to the county, on a long-term lease. The Two Rivers School District is going to have an auction in May, at which the community hopes to buy back some of the furniture for the building. They are considering putting an adult education program in the building.

The Fourche Valley group is in negotiations with the Two Rivers School District for leasing the agri building, possibly for use as a fire station, an EMS substation, or a Sheriff's substation. They have also obtained permission to take possession of the fifty years' worth of memorabilia—composite pictures of graduating classes, trophy cases and trophies, the school mascot, and a piano that was donated by a community member.

The group is working on grant applications to finance some of these activities, and they have been assisted by the County Judge, who helped them prepare a request for a small grant from the West Central Planning and Development Corporation for \$1,200 start-up money.

The Fourche Valley Community Development Association has also set up a Facebook page and a blog, put in a Newline so that people who do not have Internet can check on the latest events, and submitted a video entry in RCA's you-tube Love My Rural Community contest.

They are working toward having Highway 28 designated as a Scenic Byway in order to attract more drive-through traffic.

There are two new businesses in the community and others are planned.

As a community Fourche Valley received a devastating blow when the Two Rivers School District decided to close their isolated school campus, but they have organized and are fighting to create something meaningful and lasting with what is left.

Chapter Reports

Rural Community Alliance has 1,219 members organized into 49 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 in 2010.

Acorn

Chapter since 2008

Members: 10

Activities

- Sent members to RCA annual conference
- Added new members
- Members volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Taught financial literacy



Alpena

Chapter since 2005

Members: 42

Activities

- Sent members to RCA Policy Council
- Sent members to OTL Summit
- Members volunteered at school
- Members volunteered at community events
- Members produced community newsletter
- Started revitalization project
- Participated in Greater Ozarks Economic Development tour
- Historic buildings under renovation
- Attended City Council meetings
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy
- Started YEN

(left: Alpena members discuss community revitalization at meeting)

Alzheimer-Dollarway

Chapter since 2006

Members: 26

Activities

- Sent members to RCA annual conference
- Sent members to RCA Policy Council
- Sent members to OTL Summit
- Added new members
- Members volunteered at school
- Members organized fundraisers for Alzheimer Museum and Cultural Center
- Celebrated heritage of old Alzheimer High School
- Participated in workshop by National Historic Preservation Society
- Taught financial literacy
- Ran candidate in school board race
- Attended school board meetings
- Advised school district on after-school program
- Assisted with after-school tutoring
- Contacted legislators
- Attended State Board of Education meeting

Bearden

Chapter since 2009

Members: 20

Activities

- Sent members to RCA Policy Council
- Added new members
- Members volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy

Bismarck

Chapter since 2008

Members: 17

Activities

- Members volunteered at school
- Members participated in Merchants Group
- Attended school board meetings

New high school for which Bismarck RCA members campaigned



BRADLEY

Chapter since 2005

Members: 99

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to RCA annual conference
- Sent members to RCA Policy Council
- Sent members to OTL Summit
- Volunteered at school
- Attended Chamber of Commerce meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group



Penny Harris with Bradley youth and YEN leaders

BRUNO-PYATT

Chapter since 2005

Members: 29

Activities

- Added new members
- Sent members to RCA annual conference
- Held reception for new superintendent
- Members volunteered at school
- Members participated in Frontier Days event
- Anderson Flat historic buildings being renovated
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in email campaign for legislation that benefits rural schools
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in millage campaign
- Submitted articles to newspaper
- Youth development activities
- Created promotional materials for school
- Participated in enrollment drive

CARLISLE

Chapter since 2005

Members: 14

Activities:

- Sent members to RCA annual conference
- Sent members to RCA Policy Council
- Members volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended state school board conference

CENTERPOINT

Chapter since 2006

Members: 7

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings

CARTHAGE

Chapter since 2006

Members: 5

Activities

- Members volunteered at school
- Attended City Council meetings
- Participated in economic development activities

(Right: Community members put new businesses, community activities in Carthage school buildings.)



Delight members Danny Eckert, Christian Eckert, and Randy Abbot at Monticello organizer training.

DELIGHT/DELIGHT STUDENT

Chapter since 2005

Members: 91

Activities:

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Members attended community organizing training
- Members volunteered at school
- Members organized parades and heritage events
- Participated in revitalization project
- Formed South East Pike County Alliance
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended State Board of Education meeting
- Submitted newspaper articles

DERMOTT

Chapter since 2008

Members: 67

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Members attended organizer trainings in Monticello and Chicago
- Volunteered at school
- Organized community events
- Renovating historic buildings
- Members participated in Chamber of Commerce
- Held economic development workshop
- Held hospitality and tourism workshop
- Attended City Council meetings
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended State Board of Education meeting
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group
- Taught financial literacy
- Helped with after-school tutoring
- Submitted newspaper articles about school and student accomplishments
- Applied for Promise Neighborhoods grant
- Applied for Annenberg School Fund grant
- Opened new businesses
- Conducted youth programs



Dermott Elementary students participate in Christmas Parade.

DES ARC (Prairie County)

Chapter since 2005

Members: 15

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Members volunteered at community event
- Members attended school board meetings

(Below: Chapter leaders Deanna and Jimmy Felts listen to speakers at OTL Summit in Little Rock.)



EAST POINSETT COUNTY

Chapter since 2009

Members: 24

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Attended school board meetings
- Volunteered at school
- Taught financial literacy

EARLE

Chapter since 2009

Members: 8

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Participated in city-wide cleanup
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy

(Right: Tiffany Williams and Cathena Coopwood at RCA Policy Council)



ELAINE

Chapter since 2006

Members: 15

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Volunteered at school
- Member elected to Quorum Court
- Contacted legislators
- Taught financial literacy
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group
- Attended school board meetings and state school board conference



Elaine members met with State Senator Stephanie Flowers.

EUDORA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 58

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Attended organizer training in Monticello and Chicago
- Attended wealth creation economic development training
- Members volunteered at school
- Conducted city-wide cleanup
- Grant to renovate seniors' housing
- Gloryland Pastors Choir celebrates 3rd year
- Back-to-school event
- Attended City Council meetings
- Attended school board meetings
- Ran candidate in school board race
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group
- Started community food bank
- Applied for Annenberg School Fund grant
- Helped with after-school tutoring



Gloryland Pastors Choir in 3rd year



"Dr. Truth" with Coach Taylor and Juanita Burton at back-to-school event.

FOURCHE VALLEY

Chapter since 2009

Members: 12

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Added new members
- Formed non-profit and CDC
- Converting school property to community use
- Organized alumni reunion
- Ran candidate in board race
- Attended school board meetings
- Started new businesses
- Contacted legislators

GENOA CENTRAL

Chapter since 2006

Members: 16

Activities

- Added new members
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy

HAMPTON

Chapter since 2005

Members: 7

Activities

- Members attended OTL Summit
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy

FOUKE

New Chapter

Members: 2

FRIENDS of RCA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 48

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Provided technical assistance

GUY PERKINS

Chapter since 2009

Members: 8

Activities:

- Volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings

HUGHES

Emerging Chapter

Members: 2

Activities

- Attended school board meetings

LAFAYETTE COUNTY

New Chapter

Members: 3

LEAD HILL AREA

Chapter since 2006

Members: 38

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Added new members
- Members volunteered at school
- Members volunteered at community events
- Participated in Chamber of Commerce
- Economic development projects
- Members served on focus groups
- Attended City Council meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in school board race
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended state school board meetings
- started Youth Empowerment Network group
- Taught financial literacy

MARIANNA

Chapter since 2005

Members: 41

Activities

- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Added new members
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at Founder's Day event
- Created Civic Awareness Committee
- Attended City Council meetings
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in school board race

(Right: Chapter leader Agin Mohammad and participants at community event.)

MARKED TREE

Chapter since 2009

Members: 4

Activities

- Volunteered at community event
- Attended school board meetings

MINERAL SPRINGS

Chapter since 2009

Members: 5

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy
- Submitted newspaper articles about school
- Created promotional materials for school

OMAHA

Chapter since 2009

Members: 5

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings

LESLIE

Chapter since 2006

Members: 51

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended Monticello organizer training
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered/organized community events
- Community revitalization project
- Members served on focus groups
- Economic development projects
- Parks grant, city hall grant
- Attended City Council meetings
- Contacted legislators
- Attended school board meetings
- Participated in school board race
- City beautification activities
- Farmer's and craft market
- Taught financial literacy classes
- Artisans in Off the Beaten Path Studio Tour



MIDLAND

Emerging Chapter

Members: 2

Activities

- Attended school board meetings

ODEN

Chapter since 2005

Members 25

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings

OSCEOLA

Chapter since 2009

Members: 10

Activities

- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Added new members
- Attended school board meetings

PARON

Chapter since 2006

Members: 13

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Added new members
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered at community events
- Hosted Paron Pride day
- Community Development projects
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group



YEN members retire the colors at Paron.

PLAINVIEW-ROVER

Chapter since 2005

Members: 53

Activities

- Added new members
- Attended RCA summer conference
- Attended RCA Policy Council
- Attended OTL Summit
- Volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in school board race
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy classes

POYEN

Chapter since 2005

Members: 14

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Hosted Red Ribbon Parade
- Attended City Council meetings
- Produced Fire-Wise program for community
- Helped with after-school tutoring
- Attended school board meetings
- Taught financial literacy classes
- Submitted newspaper articles about school and students
- Created promotional materials for school

RIVERCREST

Chapter since 2009

Members: 6

Activities

- Volunteered at school
- Attended school board meetings

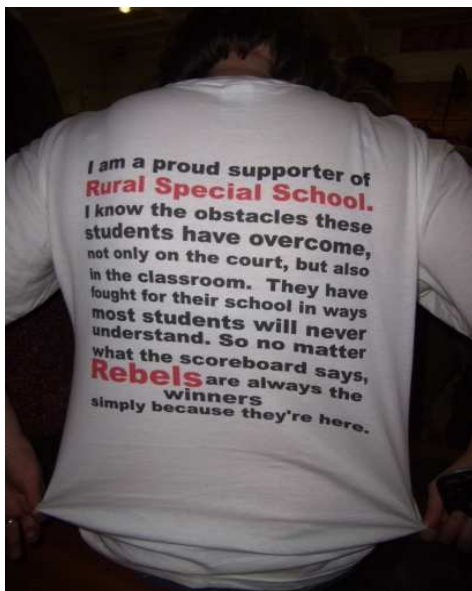
RURAL SPECIAL/ RURAL SPECIAL YOUTH

Chapter since 2005

Members: 110

Activities:

- Attended RCA summer conference
- Attended RCA Policy Council
- Attended OTL Summit
- Attended Monticello organizer training and Chicago organizer training
- Volunteered at school
- Volunteered/organized community events
- Raised money for School Foundation
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in school board race
- Attended State Board of Education meeting
- Taught financial literacy classes
- Participated in Greater Ozarks Economic Development Tour
- School mentioned in U of A's Outstanding Performance Report 20 time



T-shirt left:
Rural Special
patrons are proud
of their school.

SMACKOVER

Chapter since 2007

Members: 14

Activities

- Volunteered at school

STEPHENS

Chapter since 2009

Members: 2

Activities

- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Attended City Council meetings
- Attended school board meetings
- Contacted legislators

ST. JOE

Chapter since 2009

Members: 5

Activities

- Added new members
- Helped with open house for new superintendent
- Community revitalization project
- Renovating historic railroad depot
- City clean-up
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended City Council meetings
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group
- Taught financial literacy class



Historic Henley Hotel in St. Joe

TIMBO

Chapter since 2007

Members: 9

Activities

- Added new members
- School listed on UA Outstanding Performance Report
- Participated in school board elections
- Taught financial literacy classes
- Formed Great Girls club for outstanding alumna who come back and motivate and mentor girls

TURRELL

Chapter since 2006

Members: 17

Activities

- Added new members
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended State Board of Education meeting
- Gave input on school consolidation partner

VALLEY SPRINGS/ VALLEY SPRINGS STUDENTS

Chapter since 2005

Members: 121

Activities:

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA summer conference
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Members attended OTL Summit
- Attended Monticello community organizer training
- Members volunteered at school
- Contacted legislators
- Participated in Greater Ozarks Economic Development Tour
- Participated in school board race
- Attended school board meetings
- Planning stages of school foundation
- Attended web development training
- Started Youth Empowerment Network group
- Taught financial literacy class

WEINER

New Chapter

Members: 34

Activities

- Added new members
- Members attended RCA Policy Council
- Held community meetings to determine fate of school
- Members volunteered at school
- Members volunteered at community events
- Filed lawsuit to keep Weiner school open
- Contacted legislators
- Created Friends of Weiner School District and Rural Arkansas Facebook page
- Attended school board meetings
- Attended State Board of Education meeting

Below left: Superintendent Charles Trammell speaks at Valley Springs chapter meeting.

Below right: Weiner members brainstorm ways to preserve their school and community.



Excerpt from: **25 Ways to Save Your Rural Community**

By Steppingstones
Nov 30, 2004

Here are 25 ideas to help your community grow and prosper.

- Link up to the information highway.** A community-wide initiative to link up to, and take advantage of, the Internet will have many benefits. These include supporting and helping local businesses expand their markets, providing better market data for local companies, and promoting tourism and investment.
- Encourage home/farm-based businesses.** They are easy to start up, provide a dependable work force and have little overhead expenses. In the last few years, over 70 percent of all new jobs in the four western provinces were created in a home.
- Provide a new service.** If people are leaving town for certain services, figure out how to provide it. Changing technology can allow people to provide services to anyone, anywhere.
- Employ technology.** For example, an individual in Manitoba bought a computer-assisted sewing machine to make badges that he now sells to such places as Saudi Arabia and Germany.
- Add value to farm products.** Food can be processed before being sent to market. For example, communities have created potato factories and ethanol plants.
- Diversify.** Exotic animals have become a source of income for many farmers. Other offer farm vacations. A Wroxton district resident has turned part of his farm into a paint ball field. Local people and visitors now pay to play war games in 25 acres of simulated adventure setting.
- Improve the community's reputation.** Look at the image of your town. Make it attractive and encourage companies and home-based businesses to relocate from cities to your town.
- Re-use and recycle.** Look at things already in the community that could be turned into a new industry. For example, slag heaps from a nickel mine in Thompson, Manitoba became grit sold to an industry in Lloydminster.
- Improve an existing product.** A Canora farmer developed tie-down straps for his plane. Other people wanted them for tarps. He sold thousands of them.
- Patent an invention.** Many people in the community have good ideas but are reluctant to get patents because of the hassles involved. Many of these inventors would appreciate help from lawyers, accountants and consultants.
- Start a cottage industry.** These are easy to start up, do not require large amounts of capital and cause no disruption in services in other communities. Using direct mail and electronic marketing, products can be sold around the world.
- Elevate hobbyists.** These can be turned into a home/farm-based business. For example, there is a company in Neepawa that makes and sells hugh kites worth several thousand dollars.
- Exploit community resources.** These could be natural or cultural resources. For example, if you community has natural attractions, set up a campground, or a bed and breakfast operation. Sell products at a local farm fair or cultural events.
- Create or do something unique.** Examples in Alberta include the world's largest Ukrainian Easter egg at Vegreville, a landing pad for space aliens at St. Paul and the giant duck in Andrew. Unique events include the annual Ukrainian festivals in Vegreville and Dauphin. These attractions being in money and can create jobs in local communities. Make sure to tell the world about you unique attractions and events. Be sure to set up a Web site to promote your communities and these special events.
- Support local businesses.** Get your merchants together to establish programs to promote local shopping. However, local companies must earn their business. They must provide quality products and services. If necessary, give local business people marketing and customer service training.
- Invest in new community ventures.** Where permitted, establish local bond corporations. Manitoba and Saskatchewan allow people to raise money for local investment. Make sure that the projects people are asked to invest in have a good business plan, have been well-researched and have a good chance of success.
- Expand on what a community has.** Work with neighbours or neighbouring communities to share resources and services to ensue the survival of the region. Work with Indian bands and their resources. Look at the talents and assets of a community and develop them.
- Keep youth in the community.** Encourage high school graduates to stay or return to the community. Include them in community planning, pay attention to their interests and offer them new recreational activities and other reasons to return. Help them set up student-run businesses to provide summer jobs, and to help them gain business experience.
- Establish school partnerships.** Set up partnerships between local schools and businesses in the community. High schools need help in teaching entrepreneurial skills required by students if they are to make their own jobs and stay in the community. Establish cooperative programs so that students can see the benefits of working in a small business.
- Set up an incubation centre.** Find an empty office building, borrow some furniture and equipment, and provide a place for start-up companies to grow. Ask local successful business men and women (active or retired) to serve as advisors and mentors. Negotiate reasonable fees from accountants, lawyers and other professional to provide advice and services to these entrepreneurs.
- Set up a community marketing task force.** Get together representatives from business, the schools and the community to set up a marketing plan. The marketing plan should focus on your community's advantages and attractions. Come up with ways to promote your community and attract new job and businesses.
- Ensure that the basis infrastructure is in place.** For local business to thrive, certain services must be in place. For example, good telephone and postal/courier services are important to many small and home-based businesses to market their products and services outside the community. If these essential services are not in place, lobby to have them introduced.
- Get rid of "red tape."** Review your local bylaws and change any that create obstacles to people wanting to set up a home-based or local business. Make it easy for entrepreneurs to get the necessary licenses and permits. Consider waiving businesses taxes for new businesses.
- Provide training and information.** Many local people have the good ideas and skills to provide unique products and services. Often what is lacking is the knowledge and information about running a successful businesses. Provide your entrepreneurs and local businesses with opportunities to learn. Government agencies, colleges and private companies all offer excellent courses and seminars. Arrange to have some run in your community on a regular basis.
- Prepare and implement a strategic plan.** Many communities do not know what they want to be. Get together a task force, with outside experts if necessary, and develop a strategic plan for your community. That way, once you know what kind of community the residents want, you can develop and implement plans to achieve your vision. Resources and energies can then be better used on achieving the desired results.

Great communities do not simply happen. They are the result of planning and a lot of cooperative hard work. Consider the above ideas and see which can be used to make your community thrive and grow.

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Steppingstones Partnership, Inc. was established in April 1989 in Edmonton, Alberta Canada as a management and human resources consulting company. The Company provides a wide range of consulting, technology and training services and products to public, private and not-for-profit organizations. www.steppingstones.ca

Rural Community Alliance

Funders and Donors

Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

Marguerite Casey Foundation

Yellow Wood Associates

General Motors Acceptance Corporation/Ally Financial

C.S. Mott/Southern Echo, Inc.

Ben and Jerry's Foundation

Arkansas Rural Electric Cooperatives

Ron Crawford

Rural School and Community Trust i3 Initiative

Southern Education Foundation

Rural Community Alliance

Partners, Collaborators, Resources

National

Rural School and Community Trust
Schott Foundation for Public Education
Formula Fairness Campaign
National Opportunity to Learn Campaign
Critical Exposure

Regional

Southern Echo, Inc. (Mississippi)
CFO Rural Schools Partnership (Missouri)
Southern Partners Fund (Georgia)

State

Arkansas Rural Education Association
Arkansas Community Foundation
Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign
Arkansas Department of Rural Services
Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Arkansas Game and Fish
Department of Arkansas Heritage
USDA Rural Development (Arkansas Offices)
FORGE (Financing Ozarks Rural Growth & Economy)
Regional economic development agencies
Planning and Development Districts

Rural Community Alliance

Staff



Executive Director – Renee Carr (left rear). Renee Carr is a Certified Public Accountant with a Master's Degree in Community and Economic 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 – 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 – 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 – 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— 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.



Youth Organizer—Jayma Roten. Jayma Roten joined the staff of Rural Community Alliance in the summer of 2010, first as an intern for Southern Education Foundation and then as Youth Organizer to create and facilitate the organization's Youth Empowerment Network. The 12 YEN groups around the state are engaged in a variety of projects, including the Delta Wealth Creation Project to study and experience the seven tiers of wealth creation, a Creative Exposure project to tell the story of school and community through photography, and various youth philanthropy projects to benefit school and community. Jayma also does financial literacy training, web development, and e-commerce training. She has a degree in business from the University of Central Arkansas and has just returned from spending six years

teaching English to rural students in China.

Rural Community Alliance

Board



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



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



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



Treasurer – Kerry Cunningham. Kerry Cunningham is an educator 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 – 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.



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



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



Chapter Leader Advisory Member—Penny Harris. Penny Harris is the chapter leader at Bradley and serves as an ex-officio member of the board in the role of chapter advisor. Penny is a phlebotomist and rural mail carrier, as well as serving her community in a number of ways. Penny organized one of the first Rural Community Alliance chapters in 2005 and due to her strong leadership also has one of the largest and strongest chapters, with 91 members.

Rural People Working Together

Education

Youth Development

Community Revitalization

Policy Development

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

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Fox, AR 72051

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