

ANNUAL REPORT 2018

# RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

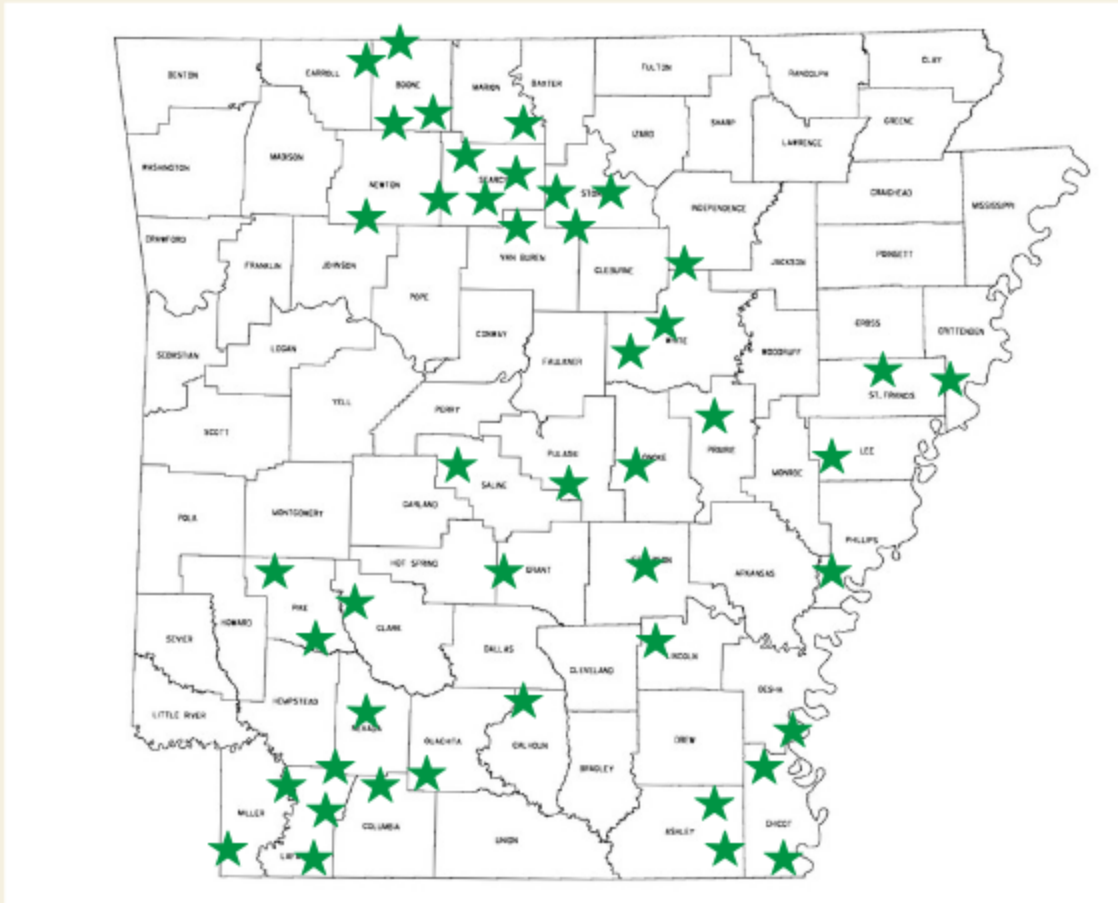
Celebrating 15 Years of  
Championing Rural Arkansas

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



# Where We Are

Rural Community Alliance has truly grown over the past 15 years and has worked with 67 communities. During 2018, RCA was active in 46 communities across the state of Arkansas.



- |                     |                  |                |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Alpena              | Fairfield Bay    | Murfreesboro   |
| Altheimer-Dollarway | Flippin          | Norfolk        |
| Arkansas City       | Fouke            | Paron          |
| Bradley             | Hughes           | Perry County   |
| Bruno-Pyatt         | Jasper           | Poyen          |
| Carlisle            | Kirby            | Romance/Floyd  |
| Deer                | Lafayette County | Rose Bud       |
| Delight             | Lead Hill        | Rural Special  |
| Dermott             | Leslie           | Shirley        |
| Des Arc             | Marianna         | Stephens       |
| Diamond City        | Marshall         | St. Joe        |
| Doddridge           | McNeil           | Timbo          |
| Earle               | Montrose         | Valley Springs |
| Elaine              | Mt. Judea        | Waldo          |
| Eudora              |                  | Western Grove  |
|                     |                  | Wilmot         |
|                     |                  | Witts Springs  |

# RCA Vision

Rural Community Alliance members have a vision to see thriving rural communities that provide access to an excellent education, and economic opportunity.

# RCA Mission

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

## RCA Core Values

Low Wealth Rural Communities

- Education
- Justice
- Opportunity
- Economic Empowerment

## RCA Moral Center



# RCA Theory of Change

There are numerous challenges for rural Arkansas. Just some of these challenges include economic decline in our communities, job loss, population decline, inequitable education funding, and lack of resources for community needs. Additionally there are threats of school closures due to declining enrollment, as well as social and racial inequality. However, we believe our strength is in our people. When we work together across geographic, social, and racial barriers, we are capable of meeting any challenge.

**RCA members believe change occurs when informed and organized residents define the change they want to see, build collective power, and take action to improve their lives and the lives of others.** We work to bring about change in communities with a process that starts with assessment and visioning, then strategic planning and implementation—all led and controlled by the grassroots. RCA staff supports community members with information, resources, and training.

# RCA Team Members

## Board Members



Lavina Grandon,  
President



Emma Brown,  
Vice President



Veronica Nelson,  
Secretary



Jason Hayes,  
Treasurer



Rickey Lambert,  
Member



Justin Gunderman,  
Member



Jonnathan Ortiz,  
Memeber

## Our Staff

- Candace Williams, Executive Director
- Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Regional Director
- Penny Harris, Southwest Regional Director
- Matt Grandon, North Central Regional Director
- Lincoln Barnett, Delta Regional Director



**Over  
2,100  
Members**

## What Our Chapters Do

RCA chapters are self-governing local organizations which strive to "act locally and think statewide." They are led by a volunteer Chapter Leader, who serves as the contact between members and RCA leadership and staff. Members work collectively with other RCA members across the state in order to benefit low-wealth rural communities.

# RCA Education Advocacy

Rural Community Alliance holds these core beliefs, which guide and support our education advocacy and location-based education work.



- We believe that the best place for a child to be educated is in a small school close to home.
- Additionally, we support traditional public schools governed by democratically elected school boards tied to specific geographical areas have the best guarantee of equity, stability of educational delivery, and parent and community engagement with schools.
- RCA also believe that privatization efforts like charter schools, vouchers, and tax credits for private tuition actually undermine the funding and stability of public schools.
- Education partners include: **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign, ForwARd Arkansas, Arkansas Grade-level Reading Campaign, Arkansans for Quality Education and Rural Schools Collaborative.**

# RCA Events

## RCA Annual Conference

In July 2018, over 100 RCA members convened for the annual conference which celebrated the organization's 15th year.



There were presentations from Clinton Chamber of Commerce Director and RCA board member Jason Hayes on how to promote your town. In addition, Nick Cartwright and Lincoln Barnett presented on RCA youth programs. Nick and Renee Carr presented about Day Tripping and Arkansas Quilt Trails. Finally, there was a legislative panel with senators and representatives from across the state.



# RCA Events

## Day Tripping

Rural Community Alliance believes our rural communities have lots to offer and showcasing them on a Day Trip is one way to get others acquainted with the intriguing places, fascinating stories, and vibrant landscapes. Below are pictures from the Van Buren County and Heart of the Natural State Day Trips.



RoZark Hills Coffee Roasterie in Rose Bud



Romance Christmas Tree Farm



Van Buren County



Muse's Country Store in Heber Springs



Van Buren County

# RCA Events

## Champions of Rural Arkansas

**"Champion: An ardent defender or supporter of a cause or another person; a warrior. If you're a champion you have it in your heart."**

**-Chris Evert**

Rural Community Alliance honored seven individuals by recognizing them as Champions of Rural Arkansas at a banquet in Little Rock. Every two years RCA honors those who have given extraordinary service to rural Arkansas.



Former Senator Jack Crumbly served as the speaker for the evening; delivering an inspirational message of perseverance and tenacity, recognizing the Champions while giving a charge to build the capacity of young leaders across rural Arkansas. The Champions of Rural Arkansas event is cosponsored by Rural Community Alliance and the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas.

### Honorees from L to R:

Dale Query  
 Sharon Pierce  
 Mattie Allison  
 Rep. Mark McElroy  
 Andrew Taylor  
 Cathy Nash  
 Ethan Dunbar





# RCA Youth Development



RCA is committed to implementing an intergenerational model of organizing, believing that youth have an important voice and role to play in strengthening our schools and communities.

In 2018, RCA continued to support our Youth Empowerment Network in addition to the Youth Advisory Council. This council is responsible for guiding youth development throughout Arkansas.

RCA is proud to join Rural Schools Collaborative in supporting students embracing civic engagement in Earle.



Students who attended participated in the RCA Youth Essay Contest at the Summer 2018 contest. The contest focused on the role that the Freedom Riders had in creating a more just country for all.

# RCA Youth Development

On January 23, RCA sponsored students from four rural schools to attend the play, Freedom Riders, at Reynolds Performance Hall at UCA. Leslie Intermediate (Searcy County), Marvell-Elaine (Phillips County), Dermott (Chicot County), and Rural Special (Stone County).



Inaugural Youth Leadership Council meeting

After a 4 year hiatus, RCA's Youth Network was revived. Led by RCA staffers Nick Cartwright and Lincoln Barnett, the Youth Network officially kicked off on January 13 with a convening of the Youth Leadership Council (YLC). The YLC is composed of 2 youth leaders from each of RCA's regions . The YLC helped plan the inaugural Youth Network Summit in April 2018. The event was held in Paron.

Throughout the year, the Youth Network members were engaged with the Annual Conference and the Cast Iron Cookoff, which was held regionally and culminated to a statewide event at Dogwood Farms where two Youth Network members placed in the competition.



Two Youth Network members placed in the statewide Cast Iron Cookoff



Youth Network Summit 2018

# Arkansas Quilt Trails

Renee Carr has worked diligently on developing the Arkansas Quilt Trails since 2016. Over the past year she's been busy adding more counties to the effort. Current participating counties include: Baxter, Perry, Searcy, Stone and Van Buren. Newton and Pike County are developing. Due to growing popularity and interest, the Arkansas Quilt Trails has now evolved into a sole organization with the continued mission of capturing and preserving the unique legacies of our beloved communities.



#4-06 Patriotic Pinwheel at 3109 highway 60 West, Perryville, AR.



#1-05 Front Porch Memories at 12585 Highway 9, Mountain View, AR doubles as the barn doors at Sugar Hill Ranch.



#2-09 At The Depot quilt block at the restored St. Joe Train Depot at 110 US Highway 65, St. Joe, AR.



#3-07 Pinwheel quilt block at 245 Main Street, Clinton AR in the historic downtown.



#5-9, Aunt D's Star at 148 Sunset Dr., Cotter AR.

For updates, visit the Arkansas Quilt Trails website at [arkansasquilttrails.com](http://arkansasquilttrails.com). If you're interested in starting a trail in your county, contact Renee Carr at [rushingcarr@gmail.com](mailto:rushingcarr@gmail.com).

# Parent Mentor Program

RCA officially launched the Parent Mentor Program (PMP) in Eudora. Six parents served at Eudora Elementary throughout 2018. Adapted from the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago, the Parent Mentor Program is a nationally recognized parent engagement model that builds deep and lasting relationships between students, teachers, and parents.



Fall 2018- PMPs after completing training in Eudora (right) and attending the last Arkansas Campaign for Grade Level Reading CSI convening (left).

Parent mentors complete a 15-hour training and are then assigned a classroom where they are mentored by a teacher on how to work one-on-one and in small groups with children. Parent mentors serve in the classroom Monday-Thursday for 2 hours per day and participate in ongoing training on Friday mornings. After successfully completing their term, parent mentors receive a modest stipend.



PMPs presenting at the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign summit .

# Public School By Choice Campaign

With the goal of year round advocacy for public education, Rural Community Alliance launched the "Public School by Choice" Campaign in Fall 2017. The campaign ran until the 2019 legislative session. Throughout the campaign, RCA released a series of videos with information about education issues in Arkansas as well as testimonials from members telling why they value their local public schools. Members were steadily engaged throughout 2018 at RCA conference and at regional events throughout the year.

RCA working to spread the message of and garner support for the Public School by Choice Campaign at partner events throughout the year.










#PublicSchoolByChoice  
#IChoosePublicSchools

Components of the Campaign

Social Media



Testimonials

Videos



Blog posts



Public School by Choice social media campaign.

# Partnership Giving



For 3 years, RCA has been making small investments into community projects through making grants known as Partnership Giving. In 2018, RCA provided support to 11 community projects.

## **Jim G Ferguson Library Foundation**

- Supporting "Read to Succeed" tutoring project

## **Dermott PTA**

- Supporting incentives for Student of the month and purchasing books for book club

## **Mt. Judea Area Alliance**

- Supporting community library project

## **Bradley Chapter RCA**

- Supporting intergenerational city beautification project

## **Hughes C.A.N.**

- Supporting beautification projects for the Mildred Jackson School Campus

## **Rose Bud After Prom**

- Supporting safe event for youth after Rose Bud's prom

## **Eudora Reads**

- Supporting the purchase of "Eudora Elementary School" signage

## **RCA Delight Chapter**

- Supporting Veterans monument

## **Festival on the Rails (McNeil)**

- Supporting Festival on the Rails event

## **Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers (ECOS)**

- Supporting Lil' FishHook Theatre project and Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL)

## **The Greater Searcy County Chamber of Commerce**

- Supporting signage for the Buffalo River History Museum, Chamber of Commerce



# RCA Rural Community Revitalization



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



As part of our 15 year mission, RCA has been helping communities with grass-roots led holistic strategic planning and revitalization projects. Some of those projects have grown into targeted, themed economic development efforts, while others have become part of larger networks.



Nearly half of RCA chapters are devoted to focusing their efforts on community revitalization. In North Central Arkansas, there are 17 communities working with the Ozark Byways revitalization network through their websites, regional events, and a regional magazine. Delta Highways revitalization network is devoted to serving small communities in Drew, Desha, Ashley, and Chicot Counties. Additionally, a new network called the Jewel of the Red River is being formed in Southwest Arkansas. These networks combine opportunities for training, organizing, and marketing of member communities. More information can be found at [www.ozarkbyways.com](http://www.ozarkbyways.com) and [www.deltahighways.org](http://www.deltahighways.org).

# Rural People Working Together

**Education**

**Youth Development**

**Community Revitalization**

**Policy Development**

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Instagram: [TheNewRuralAr](https://www.instagram.com/TheNewRuralAr)

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

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

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