

# RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

HALE COUNTY

SET (Stronger Economies Together)  
Meeting to be held on January 28 from  
8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Hale County  
Extension office, 225 Broadway, Suite 6 in  
Plainview. Entry on west side of building.

TEXAS A&M  
**AGRI**LIFE  
EXTENSION

*January, 2014*

*Volume 2, Issue 1*

## The Upside of a Down Economy: Buying Locally

### What is Local Business?

- ◆ Owners live in your state at least 9 months each year.
- ◆ The business is privately held, and not publicly traded.
- ◆ The majority of the business is done right in that state or community.
- ◆ The business is unique to that state or community.

### Small Business is the Backbone of the American Economy

90% of businesses in the U.S. have fewer than twenty employees.



# Strategies

## For Sustainable Small Town and Rural Development

Milan Wall, Co-director, Heartland Center for Leadership Development  
Lincoln, Nebraska

*Q. What are actions a community, its citizens and leaders can take to improve the chances of succeeding in shaping their future?*

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development began the study of rural communities in the mid-1980s. The focus of our study was selecting and profiling small towns that were thriving, despite dire predictions about their ability to survive. Why could some communities apparently succeed when it was assumed the odds were stacked against them? From these observations, our *20 Clues to Rural Community Survival* were identified. These clues and some specific actions include:

**1. Evidence of Community Pride** — Successful communities are often showplaces of care, attention, history and heritage. Yards are neatly trimmed and public gardens and parks are well-kept. But pride also is evident in the community festivals and events that give residents the chance to celebrate the history and heritage of the community.

Some actions:

- Coordinate a community cleanup project
- Plan or resurrect an annual festival
- Promote a local garden/yard contest
- Preserve a local historic building
- Form a committee to address vacant or dilapidated buildings
- Conduct a campaign to educate residents about their local environments

**2. Emphasis on Quality in Business and Community Life** — People believe that something worth doing is worth doing right. Facilities and buildings (including homes) reflect the additional expense and care in their design and quality. Parks have top-rate facilities and amenities. Some actions:

- Organize a high school class for a “satisfaction survey”
- Use service clubs as groups to discuss the community in terms of its quality

It is necessary for citizens and their leaders to be actively engaged in shaping the destiny of their communities. Often, simple, yet powerful actions are all that are necessary to start the momentum in a community toward a new and more promising future. Consumers Energy asked leading experts from around the country the strategies they recommend for individual communities.

**3. Willingness to Invest in the Future** — In addition to the brick-and-mortar investments, all decisions are made with an outlook on the future. Citizens willingly invest time and energy in community improvements whether it is on committees where they serve or projects where they work. Things are done with an awareness of how they will impact future generations. Some actions:

- Create the history of business expansions and startups
- Track and publish volunteer hours to demonstrate investment
- Create a youth task force on the future of the community
- Recruit a university to do a Main Street design project
- Start a community foundation
- ◆ Recruit a service club for a beautification project

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**4. Participatory Approach to Community Decision Making** — Even the most powerful of opinion leaders seem to work toward building consensus. An authoritarian model does not exist, and power is deliberately shared. Leaders work to build consensus through both formal and informal processes. Some actions:

- Use a citizen task force for policy recommendations to elected officials
  - Create an interactive function on the community Web page
  - Have an annual “town meeting”
  - Encourage elected officials and community leaders to be accessible
- Encourage high school students to attend city council and school board meetings.

**5. Cooperative Community Spirit** — The emphasis is on working together toward a common goal and positive results. There is a focus on cooperative activities. Decisions and actions might be slow in coming, but they will be collective and supported. Some actions:

- Have two or three service clubs jointly sponsor an event
- Hold an annual summit of officers of local organizations to explore commonalities
- Create a “Good News” column in the newspaper focusing on people working together
- ◆ Create a task force of local institutions to explore partnerships

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**6. Realistic Appraisal of Future Opportunities** — Successful communities have learned how to be realistic about their futures. Understanding and developing assets and abilities is a priority. Correctable weaknesses and deficiencies are addressed, but leaders don’t dwell on what they cannot control. Some actions:

- Organize a visit to another community with similar size, geography, economy, etc.
- Create an accurate quantitative profile of the community
- Interview owners of recently expanded businesses to discover the “why”
- Organize a forum of speakers on important social and economic trends

# Leadership

**7. Awareness of Competitive Positioning** — Loyalty is emphasized, but thriving communities know who their competitors are and position themselves accordingly. “Buy locally” is encouraged, but not at the expense of value to the citizens. Other competitive issues, including quality of life, also are monitored to keep the community desirable to its residents. Some actions:

- ◆ Ask local citizens for their “shopping lists” to analyze the value of local shopping when all costs (time, travel etc.) are factored
- Conduct a survey of your community on where local dollars are being spent
- Conduct an asset mapping project to define the community’s competitive edge
- Create or improve a Web page for your community
- ◆ Investigate a Sister City program

**8. Knowledge of the Physical Environment** — Relative location and available natural resources underscore decision making. Preservation and protection of natural resources is balanced with development options. Some actions:

- Plan an education program increasing awareness of the physical environment
- Have a tour of agribusiness or a natural resource as an annual event
- Organize public forums on issues such as water quality, landfills, recycling
- ◆ Create a “physical snapshot” with descriptions, photos, etc. to display in a public place (library)
- ◆

**9. Active Economic Development Program** — There is an organized, public/private approach to economic development, combining resources from both for maximum effect. A genuine emphasis is placed on business retention/expansion. A “gardening model” (growing one’s own businesses) supersedes the “hunting model.” Some actions:

- Develop or improve relations with state and regional economic development agencies
- Provide internships for high school students at local businesses
- Conduct visitations with all local businesses
- Create a business directory for your community
- Invest in support systems for entrepreneurs such as micro loans
- ◆ Establish entrepreneurial experiences for youth

**10. Deliberate Transition of Power to a Younger Generation of Leaders** — People younger than 40 regularly hold key positions in civic and business affairs. The viewpoint of youth and young adults is valued, and there are formal and informal processes in place to recruit new leaders. Some actions:

- Place youth on local business and service boards
- Develop a local leadership program
- Establish a Youth Community Leader of the Year award
- Send emerging leaders to leadership enhancement opportunities
- Develop a mentoring program with local leaders and high school students

**11. Celebration of Diversity in Leadership** — Women, youth, minorities and newcomers are encouraged and welcomed into leadership circles where their ideas are treated as opportunities for exploration of new ways to improve community-building, not as threats to the “way it’s always been done.” Some actions:

- Create a database of women, minorities and young people for appointment to commissions or boards
- Start a Newcomer of the Year award
- Develop a list of leadership positions and match them to people who’ve been traditionally left out
- Identify role models among nontraditional leaders
- ◆ Develop a speaker’s bureau representing new leaders

**12. Strong Belief in and Support for Education** — Good schools are the norm and centers of community activity. There is pride in having exceptional schools. Lifelong learning includes career as well as lifestyle opportunities. Some actions:

- Start or strengthen the parent-teacher association
- Organize a tour of school facilities
- Engage citizens in challenges of and planning for the future of schools
- Survey the community for topics of continuing education programs and develop a cadre of skilled community members to teach classes of interest
- ◆ Develop evening and Saturday class options for continuing education

*Youth*

**13. Problem-solving Approach to Providing Health Care** — Health care is considered essential, and smart strategies are in place for diverse methods of delivery. Some actions:

- Train more community members as EMTs
- Visit other communities for ideas on health care facilities and clinics
- Sponsor communitywide health education programs and hold a health fair
- Provide local clinic space for health care practitioners
- Explore telemedicine options and opportunities
- ◆ Sponsor classes on preventative medical concepts and technology

**14. Strong Multigenerational Family Orientation** — The definition of family is broad, and activities include younger as well as older generations. Communities are decidedly family-oriented with activities for all ages and families as a whole. Some actions:

- Promote interaction of senior citizens and school children through tutoring
- Provide discounts for seniors to attend school events and functions
- Provide child care for community meetings
- Ask a high school consumer education class to assist with meals for seniors
- Hold an intergenerational dialogue



**15. Strong Presence of Traditional Institutions** — Churches, schools and service clubs are strong influences on community development and social activities. Some actions:

- Start or strengthen a ministerial association
- Invite members of the media to attend and participate on community improvement task forces
- Promote Appreciation Days for local institutions such as the hospital and churches
- Help institutions find new audiences by conducting or sponsoring special events
- ◆ Conduct an asset mapping project to identify local institutions and the resources offered for community development

**16. Sound and Well-maintained Infrastructure** — Leaders work hard to maintain and improve streets, sidewalks, water systems and sewage facilities. The physical infrastructure is important and respected. There are cleanup days for parks and playgrounds, and businesses maintain their sidewalks. Volunteers pay attention to public buildings and grounds. Some actions:

- Promote a Beautification Day
- Allow youth to earn class credit for community service projects
- Explore Internet resources for grant programs
- Organize a do-it-yourself community event to build a playground or recreation facility
- Develop an Adopt-a-Block campaign
- ◆ Help state service agencies understand your commitment to your community

**17. Careful Use of Fiscal Resources** — Frugality is a way of life and expenditures are considered investments in the future. When money is spent, it's often with a "built-to-last" philosophy. Spending is strategic to the other characteristics for a quality community. Some actions:

- Start a community foundation
- Invest in updating technology and software
- Maintain active membership in state associations
- Explore matching grants to support community activities
- ◆ Explore cooperative purchasing opportunities

**18. Sophisticated Use of Information Resources** — Leaders access information that is beyond the knowledge base available in the community. Information is imported for better decisions. Internet access is available to all citizens. Information access is understood as the most critical element of success in the new economy. Some actions:

- Explore past uses of information such as surveys, reports, studies
- Use free Web sites and high school students to develop a site for your community
- Provide businesses and entrepreneurs with exceptional computer analysis capabilities
- Make sure the state and regional economic development organizations have accurate information on your community.
- Form an Information Task Force to develop 100 great facts about your community

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**19. Willingness to Seek Help from the Outside** — People readily seek outside help for community needs. Successfully competing for grants and other resources is a source of pride for local leaders and the community. Some actions:

- Create a data bank of contact people at state and federal agencies
- Form a group whose job is to develop and maintain contacts with legislators and their staffs
- Send a delegation of two or more to annual state conferences for information and networking
- ◆ Make sure the local library receives a wide range of state and national newsletters from community development organizations

**20. Conviction That, in the Long Run, You Have to Do It Yourself** — Thriving communities believe their destiny is in their own hands. They are not expecting outsiders to save them, and they know they can't just wait for things to happen. Making their communities good places is a pro-active assignment, and they willingly accept it.

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development suggests a four step process for a community to use these clues in a community meeting format. The steps include:

1. Form table groups of no more than six people and have them select three of the 20 clues they believe their community excels at and three that represent challenging areas where the town needs to work harder.
2. Each table reports to the total group one strength and one challenge. Tables continue to rotate to report one strength and one challenge until all possible priorities are listed.
3. The list of areas needing future work can now be treated as an agenda for future action. Participants vote on those they consider most important. This vote will rank the areas for those deemed by the group in total as having the highest priority.
4. The top ranked areas of focus can be used to create citizen task forces to address the challenges.

## Community Development

Communities that invest in themselves can better keep & attract the people who energize communities & create new businesses. Throughout America, many rural communities are losing people, businesses, jobs, & vibrancy. It's time for a rural recovery.

### Building Blocks for Recovery

Rural residents want stable communities, family farms, small businesses, & local schools. Rural areas have the building blocks of their own recovery:

- ◆ Community infrastructures are intact—rural communities have existing schools, churches, town governments, housing & water/sanitary systems.
- ◆ Rural areas are full of entrepreneurs—there are twice as many sole proprietorships in the plains rural counties compared to urban counties, & 70% of net job growth in these counties in the past has been in non-farm self-employment
- ◆ Farms generate commerce—a single-family farm contributes \$720,000 to the local economy, or the equivalent of eight \$40,000 “town jobs”. On average, 7 farms support 1 town business.

### Rural communities can build on these assets to strengthen themselves in two ways:

1. Feed the entrepreneurial spirit. We can recognize that rural people are willing & able to make their own jobs when the road-blocks are removed & resources are available.
2. Reinvigorate the agricultural sector. We can reverse the trend of declining farm share of the food dollar by finding ways for farmers & ranchers to reduce their input costs & to take back more of the processing & marketing share.

### An Integrated Approach

The Center for Rural Affairs has offered services to rural communities for several years. We focus on providing:

- ◆ Accessing Much Needed Resources
- ◆ Learning to Lead Others
- ◆ Helping to Have a Direct Influence in Policy
- ◆ Starting Creative & Innovative Community Projects
- ◆ Encouraging Youth to Live & Work in Rural Areas
- ◆ Developing a Vision for the Community
- ◆ Starting New Ventures within the Community
- ◆ Building Support for the Area & Community

***Our focus with this newsletter is to provide an inter-communication platform in Hale County to offer educational training opportunities and education information on rural development issues and projects affecting our community.***

Gary Cross, CEA-AG/NR  
225 Broadway, Suite 6  
Plainview, TX 79072  
Tel. 806.291.5267  
Fax: 806.291.5266  
gary.cross@ag.tamu.edu  
<http://hale.agrilife.org>

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