

RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

HALE COUNTY

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Drought on the Southern Plains meeting with Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, Director of the Climate Center of Texas Tech will be held on Thursday, August 8th from 9:00 to 11:00. The program will be held at the Ollie Liner Center in Plainview and the public is invited with no charge.

This is an important meeting for understanding the science and the effects drought has had on our community. We will look at the economic impact, Ag statistics, and science behind the drought so put this on your calendar to attend. This program is sponsored by Wayland Baptist University, Plainview/Hale County Industrial Foundation, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. To reserve a seat call our office at 806-291-5267.

Four Ways to Make the Most of the Summer Slowdown

1. Assess your Goals.

By June or July, you should have a pretty good idea if your business is on track to meet your annual projections. Take out that list of goals you wrote at the beginning of the year and make sure you are sticking to them. If not, call someone for assistance. You might also call key customers and get their feedback as well. They will likely be flattered and will provide good tips to keep them, and all future customers satisfied.

2. Rev up your Website.

Is your website simple, easy to read & navigate? More & more consumers are shopping

on mobile devices, & if a customer can't find your order with a few clicks, you may lose their business.

Don't have a website? Now is the time to build one.

If your site allows customers to ask for estimates, set up an automatic e-mail response with a list of rates. Use these slower months to create & automatically send e-mail coupons or information about sales & new products, too. Summer is also a great time to improve your social media skills & increase your connections, presence & buzz on sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter & Pinterest.

3. Network & Training

Getting away to a conference or training event to learn how to better operate your business is smart, certainly, but also provides invaluable networking opportunities. Don't be afraid to start a conversation! Chances are the person to your left is curious about your business & how you've gotten as far as you have. Never leave home without your business cards. If you have employees with down time send them to training events. If you have sales staff, this is a good time to bring them in to talk about

Their goals, share their perspectives & hear their war stories. It's a rare business where every employee has the same experiences.

4. Forget About It!

Small business owners are notoriously hard workers, taking little or no time off, even in the summer. But taking even a short break to see that blockbuster movie, visit an art exhibit or relax at the lake will recharge your batteries & return you refreshed, relaxed & ready to take on the world.



Voluntary Board Service Means More Than Attending Meetings

Questions that prospective members should ask before joining a board might include.

1. What does the organization intend to accomplish?
2. Has the organization established short-and long-term benchmarks that the board and staff strive to meet?
3. What precedence does the board give to identifying funding opportunities, and is there a plan for financial sustainability?
4. How does the board establish priorities in setting goals and accomplishing tasks?
5. How does the organization evaluate itself and its accomplishments?

Prospective board members must seriously consider the time commitment their participation on a board would require.

When you commit to participate as a board member, you aren't only committing to the position of board member, you are committing to your fellow board members and the time those individuals are putting into the organization. It is a commitment that should not be taken lightly and should be thoroughly investigated before pledging your time.

Source: Crystal Webber—University of Missouri Extension

USDA efforts support a regional strategy for advancing America's rural economy

One of the keys to rural prosperity is for rural communities to come together on a regional basis to develop a strategic plan for building a stronger economy. USDA is helping to build a more prosperous rural America by providing financial support and technical assistance to boost locally led regional economic development efforts across the Nation.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has stressed the importance of a regional approach to creating economic opportunity and job creation in rural communities. "By creating a regional focus and increasing collaboration with other Federal agencies, USDA resources will have a larger impact, enabling greater wealth creation, quality of life improvements, and sustainability," says Secretary Vilsack.

USDA is supporting rural communities that are working together on a multi-county/regional basis, with a focus on the development and implementation of ground-level regional economic development plans. This effort involves two or more USDA agencies and/or programs working with partner institutions outside USDA.

If you would like to submit an announcement for projects, programs or anything that promotes Hale County, please talk to Gary at 806.291.5267 or e-mail him at gary.cross@ag.tamu.edu

Art Walk

August 23rd—Downtown Plainview

Art walk will be held from 6:00—9:00 PM . Come walk down Broadway and see what our local artists can do!

Stronger Economies Together

In 2010, USDA Rural Development, along with the Nation's four Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) and their land-grant university partners, launched Stronger Economies Together, a training and technical assistance collaboration program. SET enables communities in rural America to work together on a multi-county regional basis to develop economic development blueprints that strategically build on the current and emerging economic strengths of their region. State Partner Teams bring together the talents and resources of key State and Federal agencies, land-grant university Extension programs, and other organizations, to provide 35 hours of training and technical assistance to each of the regional teams.



Two phases of the SET program were underway by 2011, with a third phase to begin in 2012. Phase I efforts are in place in 20 multi-county regions located in 8 states: Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Phase II efforts began in late 2011 in 11 additional states: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, Texas, Vermont and Washington. Phase III regions in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Oklahoma, Nevada, and South Dakota have not yet been finalized.

Some examples of SET successes include:

- ◆ During Phase I, participation expanded from about 10 to about 35 people per region. The teams became more diverse, with increases in participants and institutions from the business and education sectors, as well as local citizens. Almost half of SET team members view the new cross-regional/cross-sector relationships built during the training process as one of the most significant impacts of SET so far.
- ◆ SET gives a region detailed information and insights on its comparative economic advantages and its current and emerging economic clusters. SET regional teams have used this knowledge to target their most promising opportunities. "We learned our manufacturing cluster is much greater than originally thought," one regional leader said. "Other clusters, including health care, are not as strong as assumed. We now have a much clearer picture of the strengths of our clusters."
- ◆ SET has already attracted attention and investment from institutions outside the core SET partners. SET is being rolled out in several regions in the United States and Canada, beyond the USDA-selected regions. In some SET States, interest in SET has led to expansion into more regions. In Missouri, the Ozark Foundation is funding deployment to SET to two additional regions.



America is undergoing a time of rapid change. Old ways and businesses that don't keep up with the times are passing away. But at the same time, new opportunities are springing up like never before. We must foster a culture that embraces and supports the innovators and entrepreneurs within our communities; they will be the ones to lead our economy to higher ground.—Terry Whipple, Executive Director, Juneau County Economic Development Corporation

Boosting Downtown Economic Development in Communities

Situation

Downtowns reigned as the centers of business and economic activity for many years. But beginning in the 1960's, competition from large discount stores and regional shopping centers began drawing consumers and residents away, leaving downtowns vulnerable to the hazards of vacant buildings and a poor business mix.

Downtowns continue to face other challenges:

- ◆ Chains and large-format stores tend to bypass downtowns when they move into a community.
- ◆ Maintaining public facilities downtown can be problematic.
- ◆ Residents sometimes perceive downtown areas as unsafe.
- ◆ Lifestyle and new town centers continue to spring up far from downtown areas.

Overall, the combined effects of ailing downtowns, a struggling economy and reduced tourism have resulted in a loss of vitality in many communities.

Yet when downtowns can obtain the resources and support they need to flourish, they play a fundamental role in a community's identity. Downtowns often serve as centers of local government and can provide a significant tax base, representing both public and private investments. They are frequently the community's historic core and home to unique shops and services. Tourists are often drawn to downtowns, which offer a glimpse into the community's character and sense of place.

Response

As cities cope with less-than-robust downtowns and fewer tourist dollars, Cooperative Extension community development specialists from the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) have provided ongoing help through educational programs and resources designed to bring people back to Wisconsin's downtowns.

Based on the research, Extension specialists have found compelling reasons for optimism about business districts' ability to rebound from the economy. For example:

- ◆ Many downtowns have recession-proof draws. While high-priced restaurants and live theatre might bring fewer customers in a recession, farmers' markets and children's museums will still be on the list of local outings. Numerous downtowns focus on education, health care and government services, which are more insulated from consumer spending swings.
- ◆ Downtowns will benefit from a growing interest in supporting the local economy. "Buy local" is becoming a nationwide theme.
- ◆ Downtown development often goes hand-in-hand with the desire for a "green" economy. People can often simply walk downtown, rather than drive. And there are environmental benefits to reusing and improving older downtown structures using green technology.
- ◆ Downtowns support entrepreneurship, becoming a location of choice for many small-business people. They yield social and business interaction, diversity, authenticity and amenities that appeal to people with different talents. The downtown can also offer a variety of quality spaces from lofts to storefronts.
- ◆ Downtowns provide a sense of place that is increasingly important to residents. Renewed interest in quality of life means increased value in what makes the local community special.

Armed with knowledge and the right tools, communities can take advantage of consumer, economic and environmental trends that steer activity back to their central business districts.

CCED specialists, working with partners such as the Wisconsin Main Street Program and the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, advise communities and economic development professionals on ways to take full advantage of their downtown's competitive strengths. Some of the resources they've developed include:

- ◆ Downtown and Business District Market Analysis Toolbox. Tools and techniques for understanding the market, identifying business opportunities and developing market-driven strategies.
- ◆ Innovative Downtown Businesses Clearinghouse. Information from a group of unique retail and service businesses that are successfully bringing people back downtown.
- ◆ Tourism Business Development Toolbox. Business planning resources to assist restaurant, lodging and retail entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Downtown Economics e-Newsletter. Monthly electronic newsletter with articles about downtown business and economic development topics.
- ◆ Revitalizing Wisconsin's Downtowns monthly webinar (web-based) series. A learning and networking series conducted with partners Wisconsin Downtown Action Council and Wisconsin Main Street Program

Outcomes

CCED educational programs increase people's ability to build business relationships and put data about their communities to work. Here are a few examples:

- ◆ CCED faculty and staff have assisted over 50 cities in the state, including Main Street and non-Main Street communities from Milwaukee to New Holstein to Superior, in assembling information on their local markets to support downtown economic development. Working with Extension county educators, CCED has assisted local study groups in each community in their efforts to gather meaningful data that supports business retention, expansion and recruitment.
- ◆ The "Revitalizing Wisconsin's Downtowns" webinar series, with partners Wisconsin Downtown Action Council and Wisconsin Main Street Program was held at 17 sites around the state in one year alone. Approximately 175 business leaders participated. Besides gaining valuable information, those who attended reported that they valued the professional relationships they had developed at the webinars.
- ◆ CCED specialists gave presentations at the International Downtowns Association Conference, the national Main Streets Conference, UW-Madison classes and various community events and programs.

CCED specialists provide resources and information that guide residents in answering the question: What can we do to make our community better?

Source: The University of Wisconsin



MAIN STREET

The Plainview Main Street Committee & Master Gardeners has begun adding colorful banners and flower pots to beautify downtown.

Inventor & Entrepreneur Clubs: Paving the Way for Innovation

Situation: The image of an entrepreneur as a rugged individualist who identifies an economic opportunity and pursues it successfully plays well in the popular imagination. But in reality, entrepreneurs need substantial technical, educational, social and community support to be successful.

Inventors and entrepreneurs—especially in rural areas—face significant challenges. Low population density, a relative lack of resources and a shortage of peers with whom to share ideas and experiences are major obstacles to promoting entrepreneurship in rural areas.

While research shows that rural areas support a disproportionately high number of entrepreneurs, they lag far behind their non-rural counterparts in the income and revenue they earn. The challenge lies in finding viable ways to help rural entrepreneurs achieve economic success.

Response: The Wisconsin Entrepreneurs' Network (WEN) was created by the Wisconsin Legislature as part of the "Grow Wisconsin" initiative. WEN's mission is to create easy access to resources and expertise from across the state to help spawn new ventures and expand existing businesses. One of WEN's early activities was providing \$1,000 grants to counties to support Inventor and Entrepreneur (I&E) clubs.

I&E clubs offer a place for individuals to share new ideas, develop networks and obtain support for their efforts. They can offer a venue for entrepreneurs to explore and move their ideas to reality, as well as provide education on issues related to market feasibility, intellectual property, marketing, financing and business planning. I&E clubs also seem to play a significant role in bolstering the confidence of individual entrepreneurs by offering them a sense of legitimacy.

Most I&E clubs rely on volunteer staff, often drawn from local economic development organizations, chambers of commerce and the University of Wisconsin-Extension. The majority of clubs meet monthly, with a typical meeting including a guest speaker followed by an opportunity for networking. Popular speakers have included successful inventors and entrepreneurs and intellectual property experts. Tax advisors, patent attorneys, advertising agency staff and motivational speakers are among the other professionals who participate in I&E meetings.

The clubs have established an e-mail network (listserv) for the facilitators, with WEN providing other resources and support.

Community resource development educators from UW-Extension's Center for Community Economic Development (CCED) are among the resource providers that have taken part in meetings and provided support to many I&E clubs. CCED educators also surveyed I&E clubs to learn what aspects of the clubs were most useful to members. This information has been helpful in supporting existing clubs and planning future groups.

Outcomes

Wisconsin's Inventor and Entrepreneur Clubs have aided the state's entrepreneurs by providing:

- ◆ Support and a social network that research shows is essential for innovators and entrepreneurs to flourish.
- ◆ Connections to educational opportunities and larger support services outside the community.
- ◆ Resources for members to develop their ideas and apply for patents on new products and inventions.
- ◆ Help in creating and getting new jobs.

- ◆ A local venue for entrepreneurs to network among themselves.
- ◆ Information and assistance in getting grants for research and business development.
- ◆ Help in overcoming the challenges entrepreneurs face in rural areas, such as smaller populations, greater distances to travel, lack of a peer group and fewer financial resources.

Based on a UW-Extension survey of 30 I&E club facilitators, an impressive number of club participants have created new jobs, obtained patents, and received grants for their ideas and enterprises.

Most of the clubs included in the survey were established in 2006, with the oldest founded in 2002.

Many club facilitators reported that their groups were inspired to form after listening to the executive director of the Juneau County Economic Development Corporation and facilitator for the Juneau County I&E club. Seven of the facilitators specifically credited Terry Whipple, the club facilitator and a strong proponent of I&E clubs across Wisconsin and nationally, for motivating them to organize their groups.

Other outcomes of the survey included the following:

- ◆ When asked about the major benefits of their club for members, more than two out of every three facilitators identified networking as the major benefit, followed the education and access to information.
- ◆ Most respondents mentioned three elements that they considered to be the club's mission: 1) business information; 2) networking; and 3) education. Two-thirds said the club's major focus was on networking.
- ◆ More than eight in ten of the club facilitators surveyed (83%) reported jobs had been created in their region as a result of participation in the club.
- ◆ Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that a new patent had been filed by a member as a result of their club participation.
- ◆ Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that members had received research grants to develop their business or idea. Most of these grants came in the form an angel financing. In one case, a company received a grant for the design of a hydroponic greenhouse, while another club member received funding from a private furniture company for a project.

In summary, although the concept of I&E clubs is still evolving, these groups are becoming an important place for potential entrepreneurs to share ideas, obtain information and make connections with other entrepreneurs.

As Wisconsin grapples with the impacts of a changing economy, I&E clubs provide an important tool for helping the state's entrepreneurial spirit continue to flourish.

Source: University of Wisconsin

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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.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

The Texas A&M University System, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.