

2004 Annual Report

Kansas Rural Development Council

As another year comes to a close it is time to “take stock” of the past year and gauze into crystal ball to find what opportunities and challenges the future will bring. We can rest assured that the only constant in the future is “change”. It is our hope that the Kansas Rural Development Council can help rural Kansans position themselves to control their fate and develop a competitive edge in the global market. (*editorial note: for this to become a reality, a clear vision of the future needs to be developed and not until this becomes a reality will Kansas citizens control their future.*)

The first meeting in 2004 was conducted in Topeka. At this meeting The Kansas Rural Entrepreneurship committee was formed under the auspices of the Council. The principal purpose of this committee is to bring together the various business development entities working within the State. These entities cover a broad range of experience and assistance capabilities. It was felt that if these various program/service delivery entities could work together, a much stronger product could be delivered. The concept was spearheaded by two KRDC members and they co-chair the standing committee. The first organizational meeting was conducted in March with thirty-five persons representing twenty different entities attending. Many of these organizations are currently on the Kansas Rural Development Council or have been in the past.

The action plan developed by the Rural Entrepreneurship Committee calls for stronger collaboration among local, regional, state, federal and public/private economic development agencies to utilize existing resources and develop new programs as needed to accomplish these tasks.

Collaboratively the Committee wants to improve assistance and program delivery using the following strategies:

- 1) Formation of Capital Networks --- expand financing opportunities
- 2) Seamless Network of support services --- create a system among all organizations offering services to entrepreneurs that effectively transfers clients between providers and ensures adequate knowledge of programs available
- 3) Leadership Development --- support efforts at local and regional levels to ensure persons are willing and able to support entrepreneurs and address community needs
- 4) Recruitment and Retention of Youth --- reduce the exodus of rural youth

The Committee met again in July, but the express purpose of his meeting was to coordinate efforts on the submission of a grant proposal to the Kellogg Foundation. The Committee members felt that one proposal for the State would be more inclusive and better reflect the needs of the State.

In June, the Kansas Rural Development Council conducted its annual listening tour. This year's tour was of the community of Wilson (2000 Census population: 799) in West Central Kansas. This community has had a long history of marketing and celebrating its strong Czech heritage.

While in Wilson, Council members toured **Eschbaugh Advertising Agency** where they learned the history of the business and the scope of its operation. Started after World War II, the business printed advertising signage and has added many printing options throughout the years. Currently it employs 38 persons and conducts business in twenty states. Following the the tour of Eschbaugh Advertising, KRDC members were led on a tour of the Community by **Mayor Eleanor Hunter** and **City Attorney, John Kasper**. Our stops included the historic Midland Hotel, Czech Cottages, Old Wilson Grade School, the Opera House and Museum, Old City Jail and Sincerely Yours Gift Shop. The sites are all unique and noteworthy:

- **Midland Hotel** --- This historic hotel and restaurant have just been completely renovated with the elegant but functional style of the 1920's. The Midland was a state-of-the-art building for its time and considered the finest hotel between Kansas City and Denver when it was originally constructed in 1899. The hotel has 28 completely modern guest rooms that are period in décor and the restaurant provides fine dining for up to 60. This facility is once again one of the finest hotels between Denver and Kansas City.
- **Czech Cottages** --- The community is currently building duplexes in the central part of the community. These duplexes are supported by the community and they feature straw and plaster outer wall construction. Currently four units have been constructed.
- **Old Wilson Grade School** --- This structure is no longer in use since the Wilson is part of a consolidated school district and the grade school learning center is located elsewhere. The community is presently remodeling the school and making it into an assisted-living home for senior citizens. Located in the center of the community, residents can walk to all of the town's amenities.
- **Opera House and Museum** --- The Wilson Opera House is the Community's focal point during the annual Czech Festival and other community events. The facility is still in its original condition with modern conveniences such as air condition added.
- **Sincerely Yours Gift Shop** --- This gift shop is located on the community's main street and is the embodiment of the Czech Heritage. It offers many gifts and mementoes of the community. The facility also has a sportsman's lodge located in the back of the building. This offers seasonal hunters a place to stay while hunting in the area and it also has kennels for their dogs.
- **Kansas Originals Market** --- Members were hosted by Marge Lawson, Operator, of the Kansas Originals Market in her facility located on Interstate 70, north of Wilson. This operation sells only Kansas-made products. This unique entity is a non-profit that sells its merchandise on a consignment bases.

Following the tour, a dinner for towns-people and KRDC members gave all involved a chance to reflect on the events of the day. An Expo, showcasing the resources of KRDC members, immediately followed dinner. The Expo was also open for business the next morning before the panel discussions with county and community leaders.

The next day Council members were treated to a panel of Ellsworth County leaders discussing the opportunities and challenges they faced. Spokespersons representing the Board of Education, Ellsworth County Economic Development Inc., County Extension Service, Kansas Farm Bureau, Ellsworth County Medical Center and the Wilson Foundation addressed the group. Issues such as declining enrollment in the school system and fewer and older farm operators are facing the county. These challenges are being met head-on with such programs as the “Welcome Home Plan” which provides incentives for people moving into Ellsworth County, to the building of coalitions to better develop ethanol production, agri-tourism and alternative and renewable energy sources. The county’s hospital has expanded to serve the needs of the citizens and Wilson Foundation has been the driving force behind much of the development in Wilson.

Grassroots Community Development Training School

The third and fourth of a series of Grassroots Community Development Training Schools was conducted in May and November. The maturation of the training course has evolved from a program presented by the University of Missouri Extension Service to an all Kansas program with Kansas State University Research and Extension personnel doing the majority of training. To date, the majority of USDA Rural Development staff has participated. Other sister USDA employees, State personnel and community professionals have participated in this training. The Council and the Kansas State Office of USDA Rural Development jointly sponsored the training.

The purpose and scope of the training is to increase the capacity of communities and program delivery personnel in:

- 1) Community Vision
- 2) Facilitation Process
- 3) Economic Development
- 4) Finding Resources

State-Wide Library Entrepreneurial Assistance Program

The Kansas Rural Development Council has been working with the Kansas State Library, Kansas State University and the Kansas Small Business Development Centers to develop a program to assist libraries, especially small rural libraries, find resources for local entrepreneurs. The committee has been in the process of identifying meaningful resources that can help local businesses and entrepreneurs with start-up needs and operation assistance and help librarians identify these needs.

The committee plans to:

- Identify available resources for entrepreneurs. These resources will be in the form of urls, federal and state assistance programs, university and community college programs and proven private sector programs.
- Develop a database with these above mentioned programs that will be available to the libraries.
- Develop a user's guide for all librarians, especially rural libraries that are understaffed and have limited knowledge of business programs.
- Find funding to finance the development of the user's guide, print the guide and market the guide.
- Provide training to librarians that need the extra assistance
- Market the program to communities.

To date the committee has started developing the database of resources and is in the process of writing a grant proposal.

Rural Symposium

The Kansas Rural Development Council, again, helped sponsor the annual rural policy symposium at Kansas State University. KRDC along with the League of Kansas Municipalities, Kansas Association of Counties, Kansas Department of Commerce, University of Kansas, USDA Rural Development, Kansas Inc., Kansas Small Business Development Centers and Huck Boyd National Institute of Rural Development have sponsored this event for the past nine years. The purpose of the event is to raise the awareness and stimulate dialog on rural policy issues.

This years symposium, “To Entrepreneur or Not To Entrepreneur? That is the Kansas Question” examined entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy and analyzed the impact of recent Kansas economic development legislation.

The symposium is held each year on the KSU campus and in recent years several sites throughout the State have been open via interactive video.

Rail Abandonment Report:

Following a series of public meetings conducted in Western Kansas last year based on rail abandonment issues, the KRDC Executive Director developed a white paper on the proceedings. While this monolith contains the costs that specific counties would incur if short-line railroads would be lost and also the increased grain handling costs that the farmers in that region of the State would have to absorb, the primary focus is on the input and dialogue with participants of the public forums. Both national and state-wide recommendations are made to keep our valuable short-line railroads operating. **See following attachment for body of report.**

Native American Visits:

The KRDC Chair and Executive Director visited three Native American Tribal Councils within the State. While KRDC has worked with all of the tribes in the past, our relationship has been on a per project basis; mostly housing. The Kansas Rural Development Council extended a formal invitation to join both the Council and the newly formed Rural Entrepreneurship Committee.