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WINTER 2014–2015

Designing Development Work for Greater Outcomes

By Emily Roush-Elliott

In the economic and community development fields, individuals and organizations are continually striving to make large-scale, positive impacts in their home communities. These efforts are sometimes well supported in terms of funding and other forms of capacity, but more often we are challenged to do much with little. As an architect, I bring a specific perspective to my work with the Greenwood-Leflore-Carroll Economic Development Foundation (GLCEDF) that broadens not only the scope of the projects we engage in, but also the ways in which we approach our work and the ways we measure success.

Beginning with a period of study in Buenos Aires, Argentina, while still in architecture school, I began to see the potential for architecture to serve as a vehicle to build equity by decreasing the social and economic disparities that result from cultural and political structures. Today, my work is in the field of social impact architecture. Within this still-developing subset of architecture, my work is defined by

an expanded involvement in a project outside of the scope that an architect would normally influence. This means that I bring design skills to the table both earlier and later in the development process. On the front end, this may include helping a neighborhood to articulate and prioritize communitywide challenges and aspirations, providing input on a city’s Community Development Block Grant

(CDBG) application, or assisting a nonprofit in assessing its long-term goals. A built project may or may not result from this process. Alternatively, social impact architects also use their training to design public events, provide services and develop methods of engaging communities.

In Greenwood, Miss., I lead a neighborhood revitalization effort

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Fig. 1: Construction is nearing completion on an 11-unit affordable housing development in the Baptist Town neighborhood. Photograph by Emily Roush-Elliott.

Bridges is a quarterly publication of the Community Development Office of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. It is intended to inform bankers, community development organizations, representatives of state and local government agencies and others in the Eighth District about current issues and initiatives in community and economic development. The Eighth District includes the state of Arkansas and parts of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee.

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Designing Development Work

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that demonstrates how the skills of architects can be a valuable addition to a small economic development foundation. Working closely with GLCEDF director Angela Curry, I have developed an understanding of the factors that limit her efforts to attract and maintain jobs in the area. These barriers, paired with the needs of the Baptist Town neighborhood where I work, are tied together. For example, an absence of quality, affordable housing in many parts of Greenwood, including Baptist Town, is unattractive to many companies who may look to locate here. Partnering with a number of local organizations, my architectural skills have positioned the GLCEDF to be one of the leaders of the Baptist Town Cottage project, an 11-unit affordable housing development that opened in December 2014.¹ (See Figures 1 and 2.)

Another common challenge that the GLCEDF faces in its more traditional economic development work is a skills gap; Greenwood has both a high unemployment rate (11.3 percent in September 2014)² and many unfilled employment opportunities as a result of an under- or inappropriately trained workforce. While local community colleges and other training programs strive to address this issue, the GLCEDF is beginning to pilot projects that address the social and emotional barriers to seeking job skills. In October 2014, this took the form of a program called Ladies in the Landscape (see Figure 3). In this initiative, eight women received training in landscape maintenance and installation techniques, were compensated for their time, and in the process installed a storm-water management garden on

the site of the new homes mentioned earlier. Throughout both the Cottage project and Ladies in the Landscape, design and construction expertise were required in the traditional sense and, more importantly, my permanent role on the GLCEDF staff positioned me to be a part of developing organizational goals and designing projects in pursuit of those goals.

My involvement in organizational planning activities within my office is a testament to the vision and agility of GLCEDF leadership. There is little precedent for an architect on staff at a small economic development agency. As mentioned above, these are often organizations with limited resources,

and architects are typically associated with high and sometimes unnecessary costs. While buildings and design are expensive endeavors, “architect” should not be a word that economic and community developers shy away from. Architectural writer Thomas Fisher describes the way that architects work as stemming from “two seemingly divergent intellectual traditions: rationalism and idealism.”³ **Pairing a willingness to pursue lofty goals with an acute awareness of constraints (budgets, public perception and even gravity), architects can be the addition that community development foundations need to assist**

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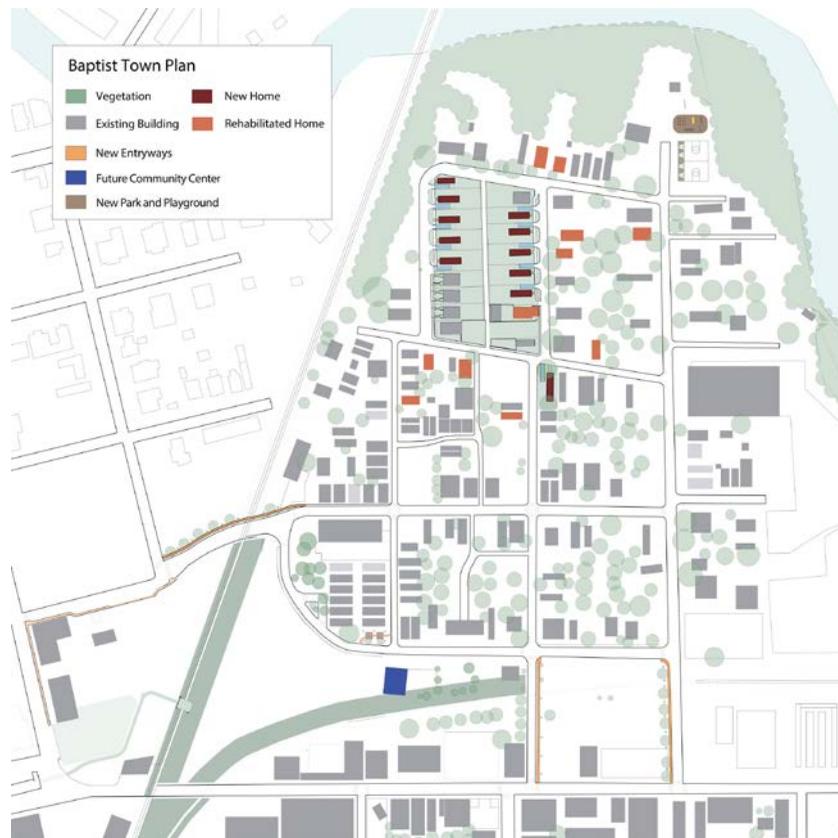


Fig. 2: The Baptist Town Revitalization master plan was developed by the Carl Small Town Center, which led a series of community engagement activities in the neighborhood.



Nikki Jackson—New Regional Executive for Louisville Branch

Nikki R. Jackson is the new regional executive for the **Louisville Branch** of the St. Louis Fed, succeeding Maria Hampton, who retired on Dec. 31, 2014.

Jackson’s experience includes serving as personnel cabinet secretary for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, chief human resources officer for Charter Schools USA, vice chancellor of human resources for Maricopa Community Colleges, and other positions in both the health care and legal fields. She earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Miami School of Law and a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Hampton University. Jackson is considerably involved in the Louisville community.

“I am looking forward to getting to know everyone at the St. Louis Fed and working together to further the great work of the Louisville Branch as we connect with the people, organizations and economic issues of Kentucky and Indiana,” Jackson said.

2015 Assets & Opportunity Scorecard Available

Released annually, CFED’s *Scorecard* explores how well residents are faring in the 50 states and the District of Columbia and assesses policies that are helping residents build and protect assets along five issue areas: Financial Assets & Income, Businesses & Jobs, Housing & Homeownership, Health Care and Education. It is the leading source of state-level data on financial security and policy solutions. The 2015 *Scorecard* assesses states across more than 130 outcome and policy measures in these five areas to determine the ability of residents to achieve financial security. The *Scorecard* is available at <http://assetsandopportunity.org/scorecard/>.

Designing Development Work

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them in realizing projects without compromising dreams.

In Baptist Town, both my rational and idealist training have been called upon to develop a neighborhood community center. Defining what this center is—and all that both the neighborhood and the GLCEDF hope it can do—has required an idealist attitude from all parties involved. Pairing these hopes with a budget of only slightly more than \$100,000, I have been



Fig. 3: The participants in the Ladies in the Landscape pilot project stand behind their newly completed storm-water management garden. Photograph by Brantley Snipes.

challenged to bring my design skills to bear on the ways in which a dollar can be stretched. This has taken the form of a class I am teaching through the Carl Small Town Center at Mississippi State University. The students are designing and building a new entrance area at the future community center. This partnership is mutually beneficial; the students gain experience in completing a real project, and the center saves money that would normally have been spent on labor. Additionally, the work the class completes will bring the entrance up to code requirements, but will also include aesthetic elements that would often be seen simply as unfeasible added costs. I would argue that design is not simply an added cost. Through the students’ work, the space is being transformed from a parking lot into a gathering place that will support the social, economic and emotional objectives that neighborhood residents have articulated as the goals of the community center.

Though not often mentioned in annual reports, supporting the aspirations of communities and individuals is as much a part of the work of economic developers as more traditional metrics

such as reduced unemployment rates. Today, social impact architects across the country are working to address the same issues that challenge community developers. As we strive toward the same goals of building equity both in the human and built environments, partnerships between development and design can increase both the scale and the quality of the outcomes that are pursued and realized.

Emily Roush-Elliott is a project manager for Carl Small Town Center at the Greenwood-Leflore-Carroll Economic Development Foundation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Whitaker, K. (2014, November 21). Eleven Families Open the Door to Their New Home. Retrieved November 21, 2014, from <http://www.enterprisecommunity.com/news-and-events/news-releases/baptist-town-cottages>
- 2 Unemployment Rate in Leflore County, MS. (n.d.). Retrieved November 18, 2014, from <http://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/MSLFURN>
- 3 Fisher, T. (2000). Critiquing the Design Culture. In *In the Scheme of Things: Alternative Thinking on the Practice of Architecture* (p. 69). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Come for the Food, Stay for the Community: The New Roots “Fresh Stop” Project

By Amber Burns

New Roots, Inc., based in Louisville, Ky., is a nonprofit organization created in response to local food deserts. The mission of New Roots is to ignite communities to come together, share knowledge and build relationships with farmers to secure access to fresh food. The vision is that affordable fresh food will be accessible and enjoyed year-round in the communities we serve.

Fresh Stop, one of New Roots’ programs, was created to address the lack of fresh produce in Louisville neighborhoods. It is a community-driven fresh-food access project where families pool their money and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to purchase in bulk from local farmers on a sliding scale. Each family receives a “share” of seasonal produce that feeds 2-4 people, depending on the Fresh Stop. (See Figure 1.) New Roots’ food justice classes are offered periodically during the year and are training grounds for neighborhood leaders who want to drive, lead and sustain the Fresh Stops.

Fresh Stops are the fruit of community organizing and cooperative economics, a process facilitated by New Roots. These community-owned food-distribution programs function similarly to the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. Unlike a traditional CSA, shareholders are not required to pay one lump sum at the beginning of the harvesting season. Instead, shareholders have the option of purchasing a share of local,

fresh, seasonal produce three days prior to the Fresh Stop pick-up day.

New Roots Fresh Stops have been described as “vegetable flashmobs”; pick-up days become meeting places for families and friends. Farmers arrive with hundreds of pounds of produce and, instantly, volunteers spring into action, carrying the produce into the building, counting every single fruit and vegetable, and finally arranging it all in a presentable, appealing manner. (See Figure 2.)

The first time I experienced this level of collaboration, I was stunned—in awe at what a community could accomplish when they work together, organize and empower one another. This level of commitment and love is contagious. It is passed on with every hug, handshake, smile and word of encouragement. New Roots does not aid the community; New Roots *is* the community. Together we facilitate learning. We empower one another. We build relationships between communities and local farmers, creating a sense of trust that is rare in today’s food system.

In 2014, thanks to the funding of the Humana Foundation, New Roots piloted the region’s first vegetable prescription program, affectionately called Veggie Rx. For six weeks, families with children between the ages of 6 and 13 receive a prescription for farm-fresh produce instead of pharmaceuticals in an attempt to prevent diet-related illness. The families engage in physical activity, food justice classes and hands-on cooking for two hours once a week. Thus far, New Roots has impacted 25 families and hopes to



Fig. 1 (TOP): At Fresh Stops, each family receives a “share” of seasonal produce.

Fig. 2 (BOTTOM): On Fresh Stop pick-up days, farmers arrive with hundreds of pounds of produce, like this lettuce growing at Barbour’s Farm in Hart County, Ky.

increase that number in 2015.

In addition to Veggie Rx, New Roots has ignited another project that will make the Fresh Stop model even more sustainable. Currently, Louisville has five Fresh Stops, with plans to launch five more by June 2015 and more on the waiting list. Meeting the demand for more Fresh Stops has become the group’s greatest concern and organizational challenge.

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The New Roots “Fresh Stop” Project

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At present, each Fresh Stop is developed individually, a process that demands the full time and resources of the organization’s two paid staff members and volunteer leaders. The model has proven to be extremely effective for reaching families living in Louisville’s most food-insecure neighborhoods.

However, this process of starting one neighborhood Fresh Stop at a time does not allow for maximum impact. Thus, for sustainability of the organization and the urgent need to empower those who want to claim their human right to healthy food, New Roots has proposed the Fresh Stop Training Institute (FSTI, accordingly pronounced “feisty”). FSTI will use a “leader-training-leaders” model to share best practices with multiple neighborhoods at once, elevating the collective power of the network.

New Roots employs a democratic community-organizing model to empower community leaders with the knowledge and tools to sustain a Fresh Stop. Through FSTI, New Roots will assemble a strong foundation of diverse volunteers who are able to raise awareness about food justice and work in solidarity with local leaders.

New Roots has evolved a great deal since its conception in 2009. Karyn Moskowitz founded the organization with the investment of one single unemployment check and has been unstoppable ever since. Today, New Roots has a strong and diverse board of directors composed mostly of entrepreneurs and two full-time staff members. New Roots has been recognized on the local and national level. In November 2014, the organization placed second out of 21 entrepreneurs who presented projects at the Slow Money National Gathering Entrepreneur Showcase. With continued support, New Roots will continue to build capacity and impact more communities that are invested in the health of their residents, neighbors and families.

Amber Burns is the assistant director of New Roots, Inc., and Fresh Stop Project in Louisville, Ky.

CDAC SPOTLIGHT

Entrepreneurship in Northwest Tennessee: Successes and Challenges

By John A. Bucy

Several metropolitan areas in Tennessee—including Nashville, Chattanooga and Memphis—are rapidly becoming premier locations for startup companies to launch and grow. Due to the continued success of business accelerators in areas like these, entrepreneurs across the state are connected with the business resources and skills they need more quickly than ever before.

Recognizing the need for a statewide increase in entrepreneurial endeavors and innovations, the state of Tennessee announced The INCITE Initiative in 2011. The initiative led to creation of the Launch Tennessee (LaunchTN) network of regional accelerators; many of those are responsible for the growing population of entrepreneurs and startups in Tennessee today.

While the metropolitan LaunchTN accelerators have been adept at grabbing attention and headlines, several rural regions are making strides as well. One accelerator in particular—the Northwest Tennessee Entrepreneur Center (NTEC) in Martin, Tenn.—is positioned to take advantage of operating in a rural community while also weathering the challenges of such an endeavor.

In 2012, the Northwest Tennessee Development District (NWTDD) was awarded one of the original nine LaunchTN grants to open a regional

accelerator in Martin. The NWTDD recruited a board of directors consisting of community leaders from the surrounding counties and drafted the original bylaws to govern NTEC operations.

From the outset, the mission of NTEC was to provide entrepreneurs in the surrounding agricultural and rural communities with what they need to be successful—access to seed capital, credible and engaged mentors, crucial and beneficial information, and an expanded knowledge network.

Serving as the front door for entrepreneurship for the surrounding counties, the NTEC board pinpointed small lifestyle businesses as the driving force in local economies. The center’s first cohort program was held in early 2013, geared toward lifestyle businesses that often characterize the types of rural communities found in Northwest Tennessee.

Many entrepreneurs from the original NTEC cohort have enjoyed success with their young businesses, including Dr. Debbie Reynolds’ Veterinary Home Healthcare, which provides convenient veterinary services to pets in the comfort of their own homes. Another successful enterprise is Tight-N-Tone Fitness, a gym that offers fitness programs and a supportive atmosphere for members.

More recently, NTEC adopted the CO.STARTERS curriculum that was originally developed at the CO.LAB Accelerator in Chattanooga, Tenn.



John A. Bucy is the executive director of the Northwest Tennessee Development District in Martin, Tenn. He is responsible for the delivery of a variety of services in the nine-county northwest Tennessee region, including regional planning, area agency on aging and disability, elderly nutrition, rural public transportation, homemaker services, senior aides and long-term care ombudsman. He is active in many professional and civic organizations, including the Tennessee Development District Association, Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board and Tennessee Homeless Solutions. Bucy is a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Tennessee Army National Guard. He received bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Tennessee, and is a graduate of the Delta Leadership Institute at the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education program. Bucy also serves as a member of the Community Development Advisory Council (CDAC) for the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

CDAC members are experts in community and economic development and financial education. They complement the information developed through outreach by the District's Community Development staff and suggest ways that the Bank might support local efforts. A list of current members is available at www.stlouisfed.org/community-development/about-us/community-development-advisory-council.

in metropolitan areas. The answer to this challenge for Northwest Tennessee lies in capitalizing on and excelling in its agricultural strengths, just as Nashville has done with healthcare and music, Chattanooga with technology and Memphis with medical innovations. And if the resiliency and determination of the business owners and farmers of the region are any indication, the Northwest Tennessee Entrepreneur Center is certainly up to the task.

With this program, small-business owners and entrepreneurs learn lean business modeling methods in a simple and intuitive way. As a first step, CO.STARTERS participants are encouraged to build and test small models of their businesses. In the process, they receive real-time customer feedback, update their models to meet customer needs and avoid creating businesses based on incorrect assumptions.

NTEC has successfully completed CO.STARTERS programs in three locations across Northwest Tennessee, with two more underway. Through its lifestyle business accelerator programs alone, NTEC has helped to create more than 30 jobs in local towns since its establishment.

While lifestyle businesses are a notable strength among the communities in Northwest Tennessee, the NTEC board decided to expand the center's focus to include a sector uniquely advantageous to rural areas: agriculture. In collaboration with another LaunchTN entity, NTEC launched the NextFarm Agricultural Innovation Accelerator in late 2013.

NextFarm uses a cohort-based process that leverages the advantages of learning in a group setting. Entrepreneurs are coached by mentors with experience in entrepreneurship, farming and commercialization of technologies. Program staff and mentors work with prospective entrepreneurs to refine business ideas and strategic planning, commercialize technology and take products and services to the marketplace. In addition, the program identifies technology at the region's universities that could be brought into the accelerator and commercialized in Northwest Tennessee.

A shift in focus to include agricultural innovations allowed NTEC to accelerate more scalable, higher-growth companies. AgSmarts, a participant business in the inaugural NextFarm cohort, is a precision agriculture company that uses sensory technology to automate existing irrigation systems that optimize crop yield and water conservation while minimizing input costs. Fellow NextFarm graduate Stony Creek Colors produces and delivers reliable, safe and U.S.-grown bio-based dyes that are consistently ready for use in the commercial fashion industry. The group of companies that emerged from the NextFarm accelerator has raised well over \$1 million for research, development and growth.

Rural regions such as Northwest Tennessee have proven they have strengths—including lifestyle businesses and agricultural production—on which accelerators can capitalize. However, one challenging question remains to be answered for NTEC and other agricultural communities: Can new and growing startup companies be sustained once they are launched?

Plans are currently in motion to give Northwest Tennessee its best chance at startup sustainability. A crucial aspect of these plans for NextFarm is to continue strengthening relationships with agricultural schools such as The University of Tennessee at Martin to identify and develop technologies for commercialization. A second vital need for sustaining agricultural startups in the region is a dedicated venture capital group, the establishment of which has been a particularly challenging obstacle to overcome.

It is no surprise that rural accelerators face an uphill battle in trying to match the bar set by their counterparts



ABOVE: More than 300 people attended The Smoketown Poetry Opera produced on YouthBuild Louisville's campus in October 2014. Photograph by Justin Philalack/Kertis Creative.

By Joshua J. Miller

Sustainable community—that is the driver behind the work of IDEAS 40203 (IDEAS) and YouthBuild Louisville (YBL) in the Smoketown neighborhood of Louisville, Ky. Can artists as civic innovators help to facilitate dialogue between people, organizations and policymakers in a fast-changing neighborhood to support a sustainable vision for the future?

This idea does not involve real estate development, but a programming strategy that harnesses the desires and needs of a community in a holistic, sustainable way. The 150-year history of Smoketown and what the community—both current and returning—wanted to see take shape informed and inspired the application for the Creative Innovation Zone, a \$250,000 ArtPlace America grant awarded in summer 2014 to IDEAS and YBL.

Following the Civil War, freed slaves migrated to Louisville and helped establish Smoketown, a historically African-American neighborhood just southeast of downtown Louisville in ZIP code 40203. In the 1940s, the Sheppard Square housing project was constructed and by 2010, 40203 was ranked the 13th poorest ZIP code in the United States. Through a federal HOPE VI grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Sheppard Square was demolished in 2011 by the Louisville Metro Housing Authority and is being rebuilt as an energy-efficient, mixed-income development made possible by a \$100-million public-private investment.

Prior to the demolition, the New Directions Housing Corp. developed a Quality of Life Action Plan (QLAP) with Smoketown residents, identifying education, green spaces, safety

and jobs as “pillars” upon which they wanted to build their community.

The demolition of Sheppard Square and relocation of its residents led to a decrease in Smoketown's population and the closing of the Presbyterian Community Center, which had served the community for more than 100 years. With hundreds of families returning in phases to Smoketown and living again in the new Sheppard Square, the lack of a community center and infrastructure for current and returning residents served as the driving force behind the work currently being done by IDEAS and YBL.

The partnership between IDEAS and YBL began organically in fall 2013. Forged through the shared desire of the two organizations to fuel positive social and economic change for young people and with the community, the partnership focused on workforce development training and leveraging artists as change agents in creating a just, equitable approach to neighborhood development.

YBL, led by Executive Director Lynn Rippey, has worked diligently for the past 14 years to champion young adults to be great citizens who build productive lives and sustainable communities in Louisville. This goal is achieved through education, leadership and job-skills training in fields including construction and nursing; more than 350 students have graduated from the training. YBL's green campus in Smoketown features a water remediation garden, urban farm, barns for construction and product creation, and an expansive facility for classes and activities.

IDEAS started as a collaborative Louisville-New York exhibition project in November 2012 between

artist Theo Edmonds and Residency Unlimited, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based arts nonprofit. In September 2013, co-founders Theo Edmonds and Josh Miller launched IDEAS as the first contemporary art chamber of commerce in the United States, advocating for an increased role for artists in both business and civic innovation.

The Creative Innovation Zone (CIZ), which focuses on eight contiguous blocks in Smoketown surrounding Sheppard Square, works to pioneer new ways for artists as change agents to engage with the community to create new opportunities in

in the community. Steam Exchange changes “STEM” to “STEAM” by using art as the context for teaching science, technology, engineering and math. Since its launch in August 2014, Steam Exchange has engaged more than 800 young people in partnership with organizations including Meyzeek Middle School, YBL and Bates Memorial Church.

Because digital fluency in today’s economy is important, Steam Exchange is prototyping a digital coding class for YBL’s students. The class, co-created with volunteers from Louisville’s professional coding

Can artists as civic innovators help to facilitate dialogue between people, organizations and policymakers in a fast-changing neighborhood to support a sustainable vision for the future?

education, environmental design and entrepreneurial activity leading to jobs. Inspired by the QLAP pillars, the aim of the CIZ is to create 20 new jobs in Smoketown by the end of 2015, create new public green spaces and digital fluency programs, and help YBL expand its current offerings with the addition of a culinary training program.

From the Smoketown arts series, the engagement of more than 25 artists and the creation of a culinary training program, CIZ has made a great deal of headway in six months. Some highlights include the following initiatives.

Steam Exchange

Steam Exchange, a startup being incubated within the CIZ, is a collective of artists and educators who offer outreach events, workshops and classes to engage young people aged 6-24

community, builds apps through weekly guided, experiential education. From ideation to creation and mapping processes, the course not only teaches technical skills, but fosters team building and encourages the act of prototyping ideas that are scalable and sustainable, from organization to community.

In addition to after-school programs, Steam Exchange is developing a pre-apprenticeship program that will help to bridge the job skills gap between unfilled positions and young people in the community. This includes training in advanced manufacturing and computer-based careers, and partnering with local businesses and members of Louisville’s thriving coder community to expand skills training and inspire a new generation of thinkers and doers.

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TOP: Young people from Smoketown participate in arts activities led by the Steam Exchange during the Smoketown Mobile Market organized by KSU’s Thorobred Nutrition Kitchen in Summer 2014. Photograph by Josh Miller.

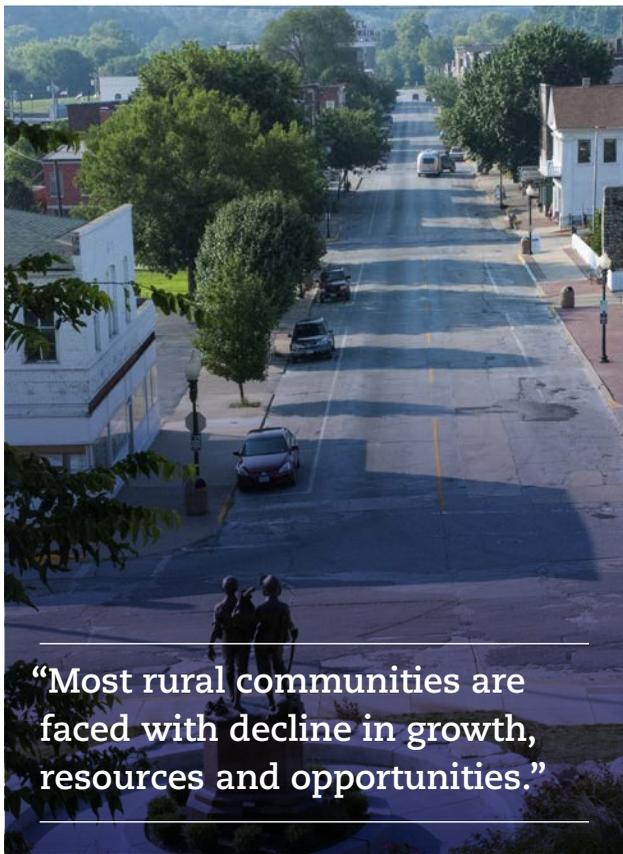
MIDDLE: Screen-printed banners created by the Steam Exchange with artist Patrick Rowe for The Smoketown Poetry Opera. Photograph by Amber Garvey/Kertis Creative.

BOTTOM: Cast from The Smoketown Poetry Opera. Photograph by Justin Philalack/Kertis Creative.

Growing a Radiant and Vibrant Community in Rural America

By Natriez Peterson

According to The World Bank, the rural population of the United States in 2012 was 17.38 percent of the country's total population. Most rural communities are faced with decline in growth, resources and opportunities. So, how do community leaders, organizations, bankers and government officials grow a radiant and vibrant rural community? This



“Most rural communities are faced with decline in growth, resources and opportunities.”

is a question that many may ponder, envisioning a rural community that is thriving on all cylinders. At some point during this visionary stage, we begin to compare the advantages and disadvantages in rural areas, including three components necessary for building a radiant and vibrant community: citizen awareness, opportunities and innovation.

Citizen Awareness

Citizen awareness is a crucial concept for the advancement of rural American communities. In a nutshell, awareness provides the opportunity to examine and understand the priorities, outcomes and strategies needed for growth. It essentially builds relationships within the community through effective engagement and dialogue. It can also be used as a teaching tool for small communities to recognize their position in the economy.

To understand a small community economy, it's important to understand how a dollar circulates through it. Most would agree that a rural community benefits the most when its residents are involved and helping local businesses thrive. Once people are involved, they tend to take ownership of their community and begin to understand the significance of reinvesting and preserving existing assets. Data can be used as a tool to perform gap analysis, asset mapping and assessments within rural communities. The results help community leaders to

analyze current conditions, resources, local spending habits and areas of improvement in the region. Gaining a broader understanding of how current dollars are circulating helps create citizen awareness and growth.

Opportunities

What are the economic engines that drive local communities and create opportunities? In most but not all rural communities, these are the main industries that bring in the majority of money, including manufacturing, technology and agriculture. The economic engine is mainly current resources, industries or businesses that generate new opportunities or expand on current opportunities. When the economic engine is present and running efficiently, communities in rural America can expect a better school system, access to quality health care and more jobs.

These opportunities will increase the retention of young people in the region, while at the same time capitalizing on and building a stronger economy. Economic development is a sustainable process responsible for bringing and keeping wealth within the community. What is the likelihood of college graduates finding opportunities in the rural community where they grew up? Rarely likely; in fact, many have to relocate to find career opportunities. Economic opportunities driven by incentives can help by reinvesting young professionals



Natriez Peterson is an extension agent specializing in community resource development for the Mississippi State University Extension Service in Indianola, Miss. He works with citizen groups, civic organizations, local economic development agencies and units of local government to identify, implement and evaluate educational and research-based programs for Sunflower County. He also serves as a co-chair for the Indianola Economic Development team to determine effective programming priorities, outcomes and strategies to grow the community. Peterson holds a master's degree in public policy and administration from Mississippi State University and a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Southern Mississippi. Working in public service, along with his love for educating and community development, is one of Peterson's greatest passions.

within the community. For example, Kansas has established the Rural Opportunity Zone as an incentive for retaining young graduates. The goal of the Zone is to expand the population and create a stronger workforce through a student loan repayment program. Similar incentives and workforce development programs help attract more businesses and workers to rural areas.

Innovation

Emphasizing the importance of innovation in the community and economic development field is imperative. As we advance further into a digital age, it is important that rural communities desiring to be radiant and vibrant tap into innovation. We have seen a tremendous growth in the American economy due to innovation. Governance of innovation in a rural area requires local, state and federal partnership formation, creating a local environment that connects people to technology. A digitally connected community can create additional avenues for local businesses and entrepreneurs. Many studies, articles and publications have cited entrepreneurship as a strategy to solve many rural

economic challenges. Implementation of research-based and educational programs that focus on entrepreneurship can spur new ideas, businesses and projects. Innovation has also shaped the rural health care system. As health problems continue to rise in small areas, providing telehealth and telemedicine technology can give rural patients better access to health care. It has been proven that innovation, technology and entrepreneurship within a rural community can spark the interest of outside investments.

Soliciting and retaining young professionals, creating a diverse environment and increasing workforce development are ways to keep wealth within the community. In rural communities where perceptions are replaced with actions, people begin to adopt an optimistic outlook. In the future, strengthening economic engines such as manufacturing, agriculture and technology will improve the overall process and development for rural communities. Citizen awareness, opportunities and innovation are vital components to growing more radiant and vibrant rural communities in America.

Creative Innovation Zone

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Smoketown Arts Series

The Smoketown Arts Series kicked off with a poetry opera in October 2014. Former Sheppard Square resident and documentary filmmaker Lavel White's film, "More Than Bricks and Mortar: The Sheppard Square Story," served as the backbone of the poetry opera, which was created and performed by a collaborative group of poets, dancers, musicians and DJs. A diverse group of more than 300 people attended the Smoketown Poetry Opera. A sequel to White's film, which will document the impact of the CIZ on the neighborhood, is currently in production.

Also in October 2014, IDEAS partnered with the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts to bring two performers from the renowned Dance Theatre of Harlem to lead a workshop at Bates Memorial Church in Smoketown. More than 25 community members participated in the workshop, with hundreds watching from the church's pews.

Job Skills Training

Job skills training is being expanded in Smoketown through a partnership with nationally recognized culinary artist Chef Edward Lee, who is creating a culinary training program for at-risk young people. Three apprentices have begun working with Chef Lee to write the curriculum for the training program, set to launch in 2015.

Through all of these programs, as well as the ongoing implementation of CIZ initiatives, dynamic partnerships have been crucial to fostering a thriving community. From Louisville Metro's Commission on Public Art to Smoketown-based Kertis Creative and the Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, each organization has played a role in helping to make the CIZ a reality. By focusing on an approach that meets human, economic and environmental needs and highlights people as the community's greatest assets, CIZ continues to prototype projects and initiatives toward building a sustainable community.

Information on the Creative Innovation Zone programs and initiatives can be found at <http://creativeinnovationzone.wordpress.com/>.

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Resources ● ● ● ●

What Counts: Harnessing Data for America's Communities

What works to improve low-income communities? This book, a new volume of essays published jointly by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and the Urban Institute, argues that to answer this question we need to enhance the ways that we collect, use and share data across institutions and sectors. Download or order a free copy of *What Counts* and share your ideas about a data-driven future at www.whatcountsforamerica.org.

Exploring Innovation in Community Development Webinars

This webinar series from the Community Development department at the St. Louis Fed allows community development professionals from across the Eighth Federal Reserve District to connect with industry experts to hear and discuss current developments and initiatives. Topics vary and are of interest to economic development professionals, financial institution representatives, community advocates and policymakers. Recent sessions include:

- [St. Louis Fed Survey Results: Economic Conditions in LMI Communities](#)

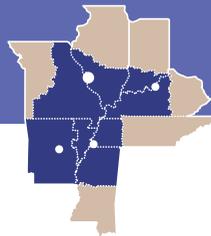
- [Home Grown: How Local Food Creates Vibrant Economies](#)
- [Commonwealth Entrepreneurship](#)
- [Innovations that Enhance Financial Capability and Engagement](#)

Both the audio and the presentation for all sessions are archived at https://bsr.stlouisfed.org/EI_CDAudioConference/.

Economic Development Podcast

- **A Promising Approach: Improving Graduation Rates and Building a Better Workforce**
High school graduation rates can have a broad effect on an area's economic vitality. How can communities implement programs to help students graduate while also providing work skills? Mike Beatty, of Great Promise Partnership, and Mike Wiggins, formerly of Southwire Company, discuss an exemplary model. To view the transcript or play the audio MP3 file, visit www.frbatlanta.org/podcasts/transcripts/economicdevelopment/150106-improving-graduation-rates-building-better-workforce.aspx.

S P A N N I N G the Region



The region served by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis encompasses all of Arkansas and parts of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee.

St. Louis Selected for Leadership Institute

St. Louis has been selected as one of seven cities across three states to attend the 2015 Community Progress Leadership Institute (CPLI), a training program focused on equipping leaders with the skills to address large inventories of blighted and vacant properties for the benefit of their communities. Cities were chosen through an invitation-only, competitive application process. They range in population from just over 40,000 to nearly half a million and have citywide housing vacancy rates of 6-19 percent and high rates of abandonment. They also face challenges such as mortgage foreclosure, poverty, tax delinquency and other property issues. These cities were selected for CPLI because they demonstrate strong leadership and a commitment to developing new solutions for vacant, abandoned and other problem properties.

CPLI sessions will address how to prevent blight and vacancy and how to return vacant buildings and land to productive use. Some of the technical tools that will be explored are data and market analysis, delinquent tax enforcement reform, strategic code enforcement, and land banking. In addition, workshops exploring adaptive leadership will be conducted. For more information, go to www.communityprogress.net/community-progress-leadership-institute-pages-414.php.