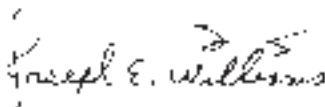


Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
*The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma*

**Fifth and Sixth Quarter Briefs**  
**July 2004**

Seventeen Oklahoma counties participated and completed leadership and/or economic development projects as part of Phase I of *The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma*. We are now beginning Phase II of the *Initiative Project* to further demonstrate Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Services ability to partner with other organizations, agencies, and entities to continue bringing about positive change in rural Oklahoma communities. Three counties funded for three year projects in Phase I are in the second year of their respective three-year projects. These are Alfalfa, Murray, and Washita counties. Six of the original one year funded projects were selected on a competitive basis for continued funding. The six projects were funded for \$6,000 each to complete specific economic development objectives. The six projects include: Blaine-Custer-Dewey, Cimarron, Greer, Jackson, Johnson, and Payne counties.

You are encouraged to read this report and learn about accomplishments and objectives in the next quarter for the three three-year projects and the economic development objectives identified in the remaining six projects starting Phase II. The Executive summary of the first year's activities (Phase I) and completed *Initiative* reports are available at <http://ifro.okstate.edu> the *Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma* Web site.

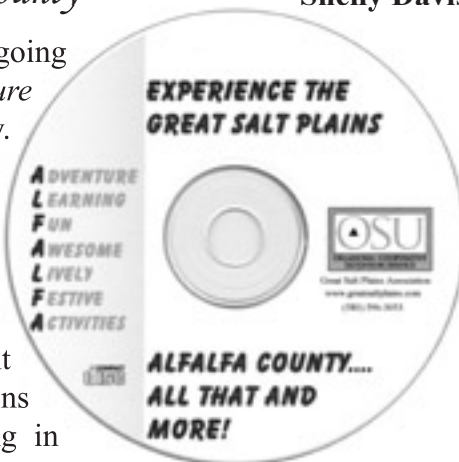


Joseph E. Williams  
Director  
The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma

*Alfalfa County*

Shelly Davis

Many projects have been ongoing concerning the *Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma* in Alfalfa County. Projects included are the completion of the Alfalfa County video filming; duplication completion of the video on dvd, cd, and vhs; preparations of visual merchandising; continuation of the kiosk panel; networking with tourism associations to secure grant funds; involvement with the Great Plains Birding Trail of Oklahoma; participating in the first ever "Discover Oklahoma Travel Show";



Alfalfa County's CD.

*The Initiative*

# The Initiative



and the presentation of the PRIDE Training program for individuals.

The PRIDE Training program had 24 individuals attending, with four communities represent from the county and two individuals from other counties. Evaluation summaries were completed on the PRIDE Training Session. Comments that were made by individuals include “Learned a lot – more than I previously have

known about local attractions and the importance of promoting them,” and “Seeing so many communities represented and willing to form coalitions to work together to develop the entire county and area. Great Alfalfa County Video.”

Future programming needs involve the development and production of mini-videos. These videos will provide more details on approximately eight categories. Those categories include: 1. Crystal digging; 2. Events, activities, festival, and accommodations; 3. Birding and wildlife; 4. Parks and trails; 5. Fishing and camping; 6. County history, trivia, cemeteries, and memorials; 7. State park, wildlife refuge, and fish hatchery; and 8. Hunting.

Other projects include being a host community for the Oklahoma Free Wheel, subcommittee meetings for mini-videos, networking with other agencies on area travel guide, completion of the kiosk panel, promotion of PRIDE program to area residents, distribution of Alfalfa County video, promotion of geocaching in Alfalfa County, radio frequency/loop, and signage.



OSU Extension working with Alfalfa County

## *Murray County*

**Debbie Sharp**

### MURRAY COUNTY CELEBRATES FIRST YEAR OF PROGRESS!

In February 2004, Murray County celebrated the first year of progress of the *Initiative* grant by gathering for a celebration luncheon. Guests arrived by trolley and after lunch heartfelt testimonies from those working with grant projects were shared. Thoughts shared the most were regarding the newly found county pride and working relationships.

Work accomplished this past six months has been exciting and positive, yet disappointing with the loss of a lodging tax taken to a vote of the people. Work accomplished the last half of the year has included the following:

**Graduation of Leadership Murray County Class I** – Twenty-seven of 30 class members successfully graduated from Leadership Murray County Class I in May. Before graduation ceremonies



LMC Class I gave back to their county by raising money to landscape the flower beds in front of the new Davis and Sulphur Chambers of Commerce Buildings.

the group raised \$2,060 to complete the class project of landscaping both the Sulphur and Davis new Chambers of Commerce buildings. Members of the class did all of the plantings. Alumni have been busy refining bylaws and planning for Class II through the use of committees. Class II will experience many new ideas and activities designed specifically for them from suggestions and evaluations of the previous class. The Leadership Murray County class was organized through a partnership of the Murray County OSU Extension Service and the Southern Oklahoma Technology Center in Ardmore. Amy Cowley, OSU Tourism Development Assistant, will serve as the program coordinator for the 2004-2005 class.

**Taking a 5% Lodging Tax Vote to the People** – Grant committee members spent almost one year researching counties across the state that have a county lodging tax. If the tax passed, generated dollars were to be used for promotion of the county as a year-round tourism destination as well as generate finances to hire someone as a permanent tourism development assistant when the grant ends. With this research the committee was able to compile a resolution, set up bylaws for the Murray County Tourism Authority, and design a ballot for the May 11 election. Once these items were designed and met County Commissioner approval, the campaign “hit the road” meeting with lodging owners; a speaker’s bureau was formed to speak to groups across the county; a media campaign was designed and instituted; and more than \$4,000 in donations were gathered to pay for the election costs. At the end of election day, the proposition lost by 59 votes. The positive side of this defeat; however, is that as a result of this work, county lodging owners are scheduled to meet and begin organizing a group, and the grant committee has found new strength that will not allow us to give up! Work is taking place to call for the vote again in late fall or early spring.

**Education of County Citizens** – One of the objectives of the grant was to educate county citizens on the impact of tourism dollars and how it plays a role in our county economy. In order to accomplish this, a monthly news article titled “Tourism Tales” appears in the county’s largest paper and is written by the tourism assistant. The tourism assistant also has been successful in joining the Sulphur and Davis Chambers of Commerce together through the writing of one newsletter that features both communities as well as county wide information.

**PRIDE Customer Service Program goes County Wide** – After updating and customizing the Oklahoma PRIDE Training Program to better fit Murray County, the PRIDE training has been presented to the following: 1. All employees of the National Park Service in the Chickasaw National Recreation Area, National Park Service camp ground hosts, and summer youth workers; 2. Every bank employee in the county; 3. Davis City Hall employees; and 4. Every 10, 11, and 12 grader at Sulphur High School who will be working this summer as Sulphur Main Street employees.

**Logo designed** – The Long Range Planning committee has a subcommittee established to design a county wide brand and logo. The group has a design in hand and is currently getting the communities feedback before final adoption. This logo will go on all county signs, street signs, publications, and letterhead.

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**Keeping people motivated** – One major objective now is to keep people excited, energized, and wanting to work together. This is being done with the long range planning committee continuing to meet; the tax and beautification committees continuing to work and meet; and with personal notes, individual recognition, and the media to highlight our accomplishments will hopefully keep us all “buzzing and excited” about what is happening and the progress being made in Murray County!

Did the grant make a difference in Murray County this past year? Yes, Yes, Yes, would have to be the answer! Without this “catalyst” we would still be doing our own thing; not thinking of its impact or of others, communities would still be operating independent of each other, and the movers and shakers would still not be sitting at the same table, discussing the future of Murray County.

Clockwise from top: Debbie Sharp screams from excitement and relief after her classmates helped her make it over the wall. Amy Cowley makes her way over the wall with the help of her classmates. LMC Class I smiles for the camera after the entire class worked hard to complete the ropes course.



## *Washita County*

**Dirk Webb**

During the earlier phases of the *Initiative* project, the Washita Leadership Entrepreneurial Initiative identified ways to improve the county’s economic base. Grants totaling \$43,000 were obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry to add value to kenaf. Kenaf is an alternative crop that can be grown in western Oklahoma. The grant money is to be used to explore marketing alternatives, develop a business plan for a kenaf processing plant, and record production/harvest data for western Oklahoma.

The concept of adding value to kenaf was developed during the early phase of the *Initiative* project. A corporation, Kenaf Frontier Corporation, was established to identify, develop, and expand market opportunities for the crop. The *Initiative* group was instrumental in locating a firm that will utilize Oklahoma produced kenaf for producing paper and livestock feed. The firm, currently located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is considering expanding its processing facilities to include a plant in Washita County.



# *Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma*

## *Phase II*

### *Blaine, Custer, Dewey counties*      **Ronald Wright**

The Blaine, Custer, and Dewey counties' plan to stimulate the economy in Western Oklahoma involves promotion of the resources available in the area through development and designation of a scenic pathway accessible year-round, and highlighted by an annual motorcycle ride (Poker Run) with an expected attendance the first year of approximately 150 riders. The pathway is approximately 220 miles long and covers a significant portion of Blaine, Custer, and Dewey counties. Included will be a "Poker Run" for motorcycle enthusiasts with seven different stops along the route to collect a poker card. This event will stimulate local economies along the route with sales of fuel, snacks, meals, motels, and various supplies, in addition to the development of collector's items sensitive to the area and event.

The BCD-Leadership Initiative Project has also had discussions with the Great Plains Trail Loop of Oklahoma to make this pathway a part of their viewing trail. The Great Plains Trail Loop of Oklahoma has indicated they would be willing to consider changing their boundaries to incorporate this pathway. This would set up the Western Oklahoma River Road Run Trail as a wildlife viewing trail.

### *Cimarron County*      **Marty Albright**

Cimarron County LEAD (Leadership, Education, And Development) intends to build on steps taken by LEAD in 2003 to plan for Cimarron County's economic and community development. LEAD's goals for Phase II are:

- Create a Comprehensive Strategic Plan for economic development in conjunction with the Cimarron County Chamber of Commerce. This plan would become a common blueprint for community and county organizations, as well as city, county, and state governments and agencies to prioritize and coordinate efforts toward the common goals of a strong economy and more attractive communities in Cimarron County.
- Underwrite and support efforts of the Trucking Industry Council to study, establish relationships with, and research the needs of companies in the trucking industry that are utilizing and will utilize the Ports-to-Plains Highway. The vision is to develop Cimarron County as a trucking industry hub for the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor.

### *Greer County*      **Jeff Dill**

Greer County focused on building a strong economic development leadership team during Phase I of the *Initiative* project. During this process the team identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to Greer County's economy. A strategic plan to address these issues has been completed. One goal outlined in the strategic plan is that of promoting and growing existing

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business and industry. An identified objective for this goal is to create a Greer County advertising campaign. One of the strategic tasks for this objective is to create a Web campaign for Greer County's government and non-profit agencies to establish Greer County's presence on the Internet.

The Greer County Extension Leadership Committee is in partnership with the Greer County and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service and with their expertise will develop Web sites with local governments, government agencies/entities, educational entities/clubs, non-profit organizations, and civic organizations in an attempt to establish a viable Web presence for Greer County.

Web sites will be required to be linked to other Greer County Web sites developed in this project and will contain a logo identifying them as participants of the Greer County *Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma* Phase II project.

## *Jackson County*

**Gary Strickland**

Jackson County's initial Economic Development Leadership Training Conference was an effort in starting both community and economic development awareness. Many objectives were identified in our initial one-year effort, but two of the most critical were the development of a County Wide Economic Development Team and Community Profile Information. The Phase II objectives are:

- Development of a County/Community and Economic Development Web site that will serve as a comprehensive county wide resource site.
- Development of a County/Community and Economic Development publication.
- Develop the community Web site functional ability either through training, technical assistance, or purchase of community computer.
- Develop training related to Web site maintenance and community and economic development.

## *Johnston County*

**Ginny McCarthick**

The Tishomingo Development Team (TDT) has been established and working in the community for the past two years. The TDT was established to develop leaders in our community by offering educational opportunities, as well as actual learning opportunities in a hands-on approach of attempting and completing projects designed to "Make Our Community a Place Where People Want to Live and Work." The objectives for Phase II were identified during Phase I of the project. The objectives are being addressed by five committees:

1. Community Image Committee (community planning) – The primary goal of the CI Committee is to inspire and maintain a sense of civic pride and responsibility in the community by working to improve our city's image.
2. Public Relations Committee (community planning) – The objectives of this committee are to improve communication, collaboration, and cooperation

among city partners and to develop an aggressive and diverse program of public relations and promotions to successfully market community attractions and events to both residents and tourists.

3. Business Development Committee (community planning) – The objective of the Business Development Committee is to work for improved, expanded, and sustained diverse business development.
4. The final objective of the TDT is to develop opportunities to inspire a tradition of leadership and community service among county residents. The team divided into two committees to address this objective. A Youth Leadership Development Committee will sponsor an annual Children’s Fall Carnival and continue conducting a Youth Leadership Development program with 10 local youth. The Adult Leadership Development Committee will develop a formal county leadership program.

*Payne County*

**Nathan Anderson**

The Payne County Leadership Legacy for Sister Cities was unique in that it brought together two cities (Perkins and Yale), each at a distinctly different phase of community involvement in economic development. The objective for Phase II is primarily business training and entrepreneur development in Perkins, while at the same time keeping the lines of communication between Perkins and Yale open and active. An outcome of the Payne County Leadership Legacy for Sister Cities was the development of a Perkins organization that calls itself the Greater Perkins Area Economic Development Authority (GPAEDA). Its mission is to be the hub of economic development efforts in the greater Perkins area. Objectives for Phase II are:

1. Identification of local business needs and to identify the impediments to doing business and to take positive actions to eliminate them.
2. Better educate employers and improved customer service by frontline employees in Perkins, Yale, and surrounding towns.
3. Conduct workshops to improve entrepreneurship and management ability of Perkins and other Payne County residents. The curriculum for the workshops will draw on similar programs offered by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the Food and Agricultural Products Center, and the Small Business Administration.

The overall GPAEDA objectives for Phase II are business attraction, retention, and expansion.

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# Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

## *The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma*

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*The Initiative*

You are invited to contact Joe Williams at 405.744.6174 or visit *The Initiative for the Future of Rural Oklahoma* website at <http://ifro.okstate.edu/> to learn more about the *Initiative's* projects, counties, and communities.

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