

SUMMER/FALL 2006

VISIONS



A publication of the
Heartland Center for
Leadership Development

Adventures in Community Development:

Success in Blue Hill

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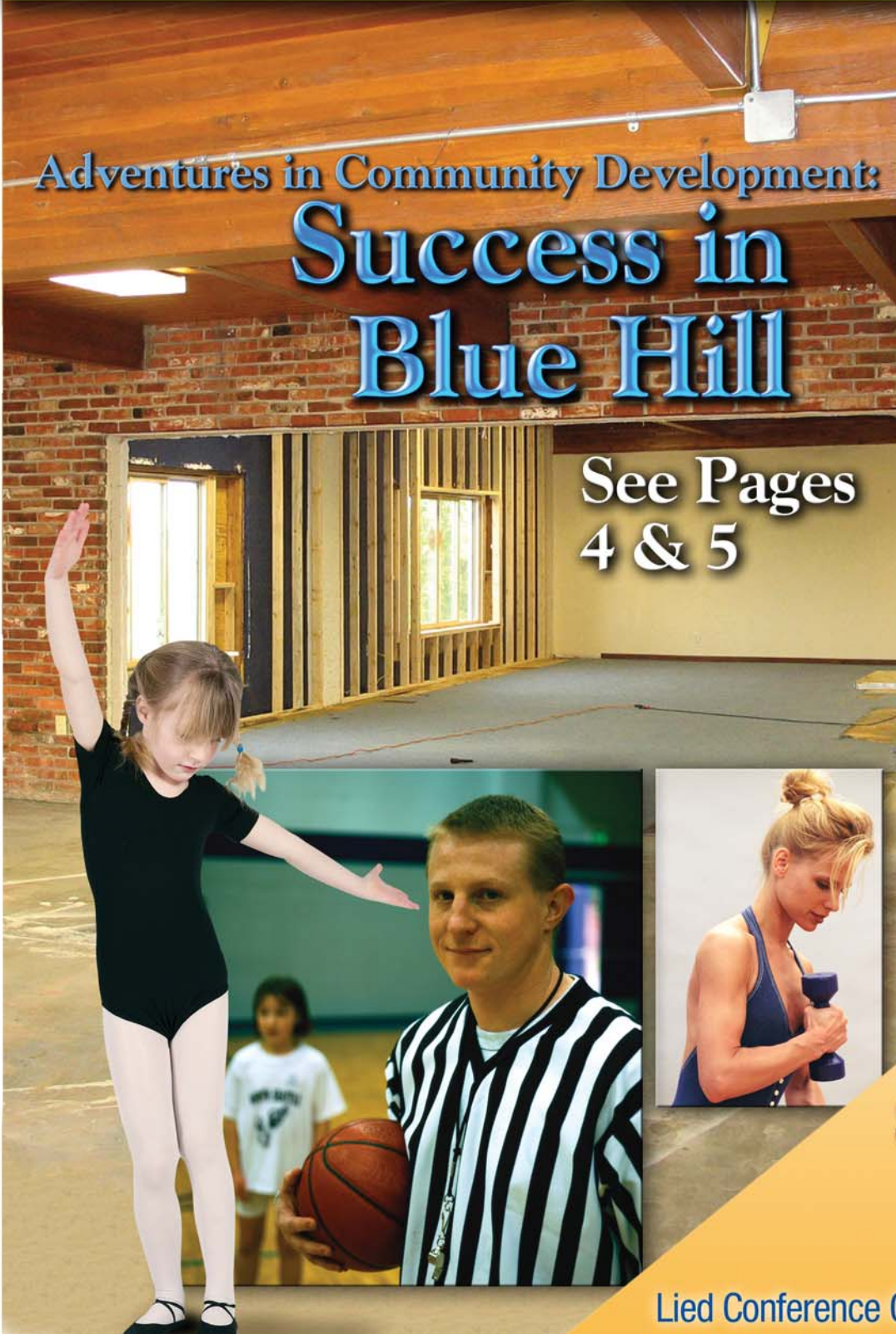
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New
Location
Announced for

**Helping
Small Towns
Succeed**

October 10-12, 2006

Lied Conference Center, Nebraska City, Nebraska





VISIONS
from the
Heartland

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The Heartland Center is
an independent nonprofit
organization developing local
leadership that responds to
the challenges of the future.

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Heartland Center Projects Featured in Online Journal

Two Heartland Center projects will be the subjects of articles that will appear in the new *Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy*. The *Online Journal* is an academic journal written in plain English with the purpose of providing useful information on matters of rural importance. The journal is based at Kansas State University and sponsored by the North Central Regional Planning Commission.

Upcoming issues of the journal will include an article on the training program developed by the Center for United Tribes Technical College that aimed to build capacity among tribal planners and economic development specialists. Program Associate Kurt Mantonya is the author of that article. Co-Director Vicki Luther authored a second article on the HomeTown Competitiveness approach to community sustainability which will also appear in a future issue.

Visit the *Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy* at www.ojrrp.org/ or contact Managing Editor, Tom Gould, at tgould@ksu.edu

A New Cadre of Community Capacity and Assessment Trainers

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development in conjunction with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development recently trained 25 participants statewide to become Community Capacity and Assessment Trainers. The community version of this curriculum was initially developed and delivered by the Heartland Center in 2004 and 2005. The curriculum, entitled *Discovering the Future of Your Town*, focuses on rural community leadership development. The 12- to 15-hour long curriculum is broken into six modules that include the following topics.

1. Appreciative Inquiry as a tool for community planning
2. Managing Community Collaboration as a means to increase partnerships for community and economic development
3. Building Local Leadership through community leadership development programs designed to strengthen and sustain community capacity

The Train-the-Trainer workshops were held in three community colleges in the state of Nebraska, including Mid-Plains Community College at McCook, Southeast Community College at Beatrice and Northeast Community College at Norfolk.

Participants in the training cadre were selected based on their community development experience in their communities or their work as community development specialists for other agencies, such as Community Colleges, University Extension, RC&Ds and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

The long-term plan is delivery of this curriculum on an ongoing basis in partnership with the Nebraska Community College System as a continuing education course with trainers located throughout the state. Working with a Community College in their region, the trainers will be able to offer the curriculum to interested community members on a flexible schedule. The curriculum is adaptable enough to stand alone or to be incorporated into courses on economic development, rural sociology, community development, or leadership.

“What an interesting proposition...this idea of training trainers and then matching trainers up with the Community Colleges. I was very interested in attending and got a lot out of the training. Now I can't wait to go out there and provide this training.”

—Train-the-Trainers Workshop Participant



NORTH DAKOTA HOSTS HTC ACADEMY

Fifty-eight development agency representatives and community leaders attended a HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) “mini-academy” in Carrington, North Dakota, as part of a long-term plan to consider adopting HTC as a community and economic development strategy throughout this Northern Great Plains state.

This academy, facilitated by Heartland Center Co-Director Milan Wall and Board President Craig Schroeder, is one of a growing number of indications of interest in HTC throughout the United States. Schroeder, a senior associate of the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and Wall facilitated a similar academy last year in Montana. Outside of Nebraska, academies and similar workshops have also been held in Texas, Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, Nevada and Maine, and another is scheduled in Michigan this fall. “We’ve found that many parts of the country want to try out our HTC approach, and folks are really receptive to the ideas in our Academy. Our information is good, the pace is quick and everything is immediately applicable,” says Co-Director Wall.

HomeTown Competitiveness is an initiative of four organizations, including Heartland Center, RUPRI

Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Center for Rural Affairs and Nebraska Community Foundation. HTC focuses local community and economic development efforts on four related strategies: youth engagement, leadership development, energizing entrepreneurship, and capturing wealth transfer. The initiative’s work in Nebraska is supported by a major grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The North Dakota academy was sponsored by a coalition of community and economic development agencies, including the REAP Investment Fund, Inc, the Griggs-Steele Empowerment Zone, NDSU–Extension Center for Community Vitality, ND Department of Commerce, ND Bankers Association and Montana-Dakota Utilities. Breaks were sponsored by Carrington Economic Development Corporation, Ottertail Power Company and Northern Plains Electric Cooperative.



Co-Director Milan Wall conducting a session at the HTC Academy in Carrington, ND.

Reaching People with a Variety of Training Topics

For over 20 years, the Heartland Center has focused on the design and delivery of high quality training, various types of planning and citizen involvement projects and highly focused, practical research and evaluation. As a result, we’ve developed a range of topics that can address a wide variety of interest.

Our typical audience is made up of elected and appointed officials, community and rural development professionals, all types of volunteers and interested citizens. We take pride in delivering training and helping with projects that prepare community leaders to face the challenges of the future.

A few of our most recent training topics include:

- Leadership Skills and Capacity Building
- Recruiting and Motivating New leaders and Volunteers
- Skills for Board Members
- Strengthening Social Capital
- Overcoming Community Polarization
- Turning Diversity into Opportunities
- Conflict Management Skills and Strategies
- Facilitation Skills: From Beginner to Advanced
- Nurturing Entrepreneurship in Rural Communities
- Youth Engagement Strategies

These topics reflect the range of experience among our staff and associates, who work hard to customize and adapt training programs to meet the needs and interests of every group. Well known for an educational approach that is both informal and practical, our trainers enjoy planning with workshop sponsors to make sure the final product is truly useful to the participants.

More information and sample project descriptions are included on our web site at: www.heartlandcenter.info.

Adventures in Community Development: Success in Blue Hill



Micki works for Glenwood Telephone Company and moved to Blue Hill with her family in 1994. Along with her husband of 28 years and 3 daughters, she's very active in community projects.

Sometimes, I would wonder to myself—what has this got to do with us? But then I would really listen and try to find a lesson to incorporate into our project.

—Micki Schmidt

Blue Hill, Nebraska, is a small town, population 850, located in south central Nebraska. It's not really a farming town any longer but rather a bedroom community for the tri-city area in that part of the state. About 54% of the residents commute to work and, in fact, only 23% of the residents work in the community.

The following interview with Micki Schmidt offers some insights into a community project in this town that has succeeded not only in the project itself but in raising the capacity of local folks to sustain and improve their hometown. Micki attended several training sessions led by the Heartland Center that featured Appreciative Inquiry as a project planning tool. She took that training and went home to work on the idea of a Fitness Center for the community, an idea that had been talked about for quite a while. Micki works for a regional telephone company.

When you first started planning work sessions for this community project (creating the Fitness Center), what was the biggest obstacle you faced?

Micki: Reaching out to people and finding times that worked for meetings. Keeping everyone focused was a challenge too. The training really helped to organize the work sessions and we got compliments on how smoothly our meetings went. We held at least three information/organization meetings before we decided the route we would take. The Fitness Center project started out under the wing of the Blue Hill Community Club, and I was asked to help, as well. In fact, when I did the Heartland Center training, I wrote some articles for the newspaper about it and that led them to me.

I think the most interesting thing that happened in this process occurred after we divided up into

groups to explore goals and everyone was way too specific, sort of problem-solving instead of thinking about goals. Then an older gentleman seemed to understand the concept and wrote down some ideas that became our vision statement:

"Provide a strong foundation for the health and fitness of all ages, now and in the future."

I keep that handwritten note he made as inspiration!

How did you use Appreciative Inquiry?

Micki: Using the Appreciative Inquiry approach helped sort through all the "stories" that older folks shared in our meetings. Sometimes, I would wonder to myself—what has this got to do with us? But then I would really listen and try to find a lesson to incorporate into our project. I also noticed that after getting the group to do this, we were all more positive when other members started talking.

How did you recruit folks?

Micki: The local newspaper has been very supportive, usually giving us front page coverage and notice space. We also used e-mail to our list of volunteers, phone calls and the local marquee downtown to inform every one of workdays and meetings. We've done a lot of renovation and did walls and installed new windows, paint, etc., during those work days.

What were the steps your group went through in turning the Fitness Center from an idea to reality?

Micki: In addition to gathering a core group and then recruiting a lot of volunteers we had to survey the town for interest. We got over 50% returns and a very strong interest in joining the Fitness Center. We also incorporated as a non-profit and elected a



Blue Hill youngsters helped with planning and fundraising for the fitness center.

board of directors. Then there were really specific things like leasing the main floor of the city owned golf course clubhouse, researching equipment, planning the arrangement of the Fitness Center and lots of fund raising.

We've raised over \$20,000 so far through individual gifts (we had five at \$1,000 each!), a Founders' Fund of \$250 or more and one grant for \$5,000 with others pending. We also did a fund raising event with a style show and silent auction that brought in over \$4,000.

We wanted to open by the end of summer and it looks like we'll make it by the end of September.

What's ahead for your group and Blue Hill? Is there a project already in line?

Micki: Our Community Club is working on changing its image from a local Chamber to an organization that represents all of our area residents, not just business. The current President has started quarterly meetings in the evening to invite targeted groups such as teachers and administrators, farmers, even one "Bring a Friend" evening. We're also starting to work on a website for our community.



Volunteers practiced for the fund raiser event.



The site of the Fitness Center has been remodeled by local volunteers.



Blue Hill Benchmarks

- Organized and expanded a work group
- Created a vision statement
- Surveyed the community for interest
- Identified a site for the Fitness Center
- Incorporated as a nonprofit organization, Blue Hill Fitness Center, Inc.
- Leased space from the local government
- Researched, selected and located specialized equipment
- Planned 3 areas for the Fitness Center: cardio/circuit, weight training and aerobics
- Organized and managed numerous community work days for building renovation by volunteers
- Fund raising: private individuals, groups and special events
- Grant writing
- Advance membership sales

Update: Citizen Involvement in Flood Plain Mapping

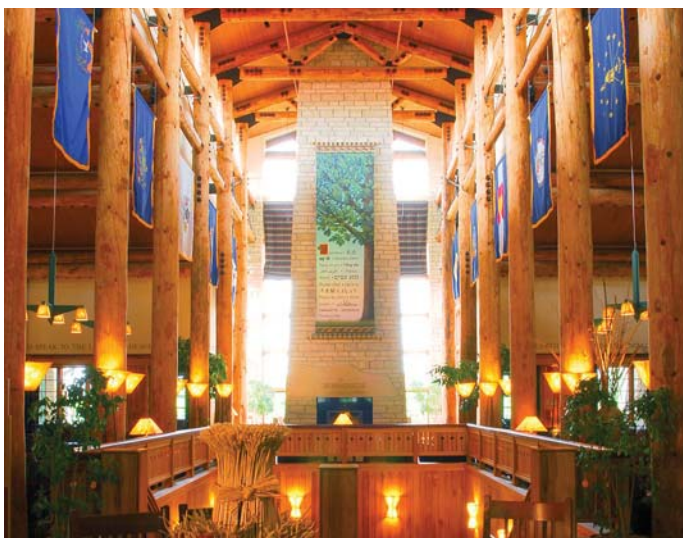
The Heartland Center has recently been involved in two watershed Master Plan projects for the city of Lincoln. These include the Cardwell Branch and Deadmans Run. The Cardwell Branch Watershed is located in the southwest part of Lincoln, just outside the current city limits. It is expected that this rural area will experience growth in the coming years that will impact the natural resources and stream channels within this watershed. Deadmans Run watershed encompasses an urbanized area in north and east Lincoln.

Both projects have public involvement components in which the Heartland Center is the lead agency in a multi-partner collaboration. The Center's involvement includes helping identify key stakeholders, conducting focus group meetings and public open house meetings, collecting citizen comments, and helping to form citizen advisory committees and facilitating these meetings as well.

Finally, the Center is instrumental in writing and publishing the "Watershed News," a newsletter that updates citizens within the respective watersheds on progress and offers a means of general education about the watersheds and the planning process. The newsletter is a great addition to the traditional involvement techniques and is available in both print and electronic forms.

Designing and managing the citizen participation in watershed and floodplain planning are not new to the Center, as we have been engaged as facilitators for several years in natural resource management projects. In fact, our staff has recently concluded additional projects that concerned neighborhood flood control and storm water management.

Information on both watershed projects and newsletters can be found on the city of Lincoln's website at lincoln.ne.gov, keyword 'watershed.'



Don't Miss It! Helping Small Towns Succeed

will be offered October 10, 11 and 12, 2006, at the Lied Conference Center in Nebraska City, Nebraska. The curriculum will feature Leadership Development, Appreciative Inquiry as a revitalization tool, Building Social Capital, Measurement of Project Results, and Diversity as an Opportunity.

The Lied Conference Center provides transportation from Omaha's Eppley airport for a fee. Lied Lodge and Conference Center, one of the nation's premier training facilities, is a completely "green" facility owned by the National Arbor Day Foundation. Nebraska City, home of Arbor Day, offers many historical sites including a new Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.

Check out the curriculum and registration information at www.heartlandcenter.info.

Resources for Small Town Success Publications of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development

Publication Order Form

Postage and handling are included in the price of the publication for orders within the U.S.

Cost of publication to be paid in U.S. dollars.

(Prices subject to change without notice.)

Send to:

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___ Seven Secrets to Coping with Change in Small Towns \$ 5.00 _____

___ Six Myths about the Future of Small Towns \$ 5.00 _____

___ Ten Ideas for Recruiting New Leaders \$ 5.00 _____

___ The Entrepreneurial Community \$35.00 _____

___ Your Field Guide to Community Building \$18.50 _____

TOTAL _____



Can You Help?

Have you attended a training offered by the Heartland Center?

Has your town held a Town Hall meeting or completed a strategic plan with our assistance?

We're asking for help in building our scholarship fund, The Community Learning Initiative, so that we can offer scholarships to key learning programs that we offer or co-sponsor.

Each year, people who attend Helping Small Towns Succeed may apply for small scholarships to help pay for tuition. Of course, we need contributions from people like you to continue to make that possible! It would be especially meaningful for anyone who has received a scholarship to make a contribution to help others in the same way. All members of our board of directors and staff have made contributions.

If you'd consider a donation to our scholarship fund, you can find a contribution option on our web site, www.heartlandcenter.info or simply mail a contribution to our office at 650 J Street, Suite 305-C, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508. Remember, the Heartland Center is a 501(c)(3) organization, so your contribution is tax deductible.

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Ask The Heartland Center

Question: I'd love to organize a training session on a number of topics for our town but I haven't a clue how to pay for it. Any ideas on how to afford getting high quality training for our community leaders?



Milan Wall
Co-Director

Lower your costs by getting a local resource, such as an Extension Educator or staff from a community college, to be a co-trainer with an outside expert. The combination will bring new ideas and techniques to your training program.



Vicki Luther
Co-Director

First of all, don't be shy about asking for a registration fee. We've found that training events that are offered with no charge at all are often ignored by residents, or those that do sign up are pretty casual about whether or not they really attend. A registration fee should be reasonable but at least cover part of the costs.



Kurt Mantonya
Program Associate

You can approach local businesses for contributions. The first contribution is usually the toughest, but once you have some dollars from business A, you'll find that Businesses B and C are more likely to contribute, too. Sometimes it helps to make your request very concrete such as sponsoring a meal, paying for a facility or part of the trainer's fees or travel.



Valarie Shangreaux
Board Member

In Indian Country, there are specialized funding sources that can help, but any rural community can approach rural electric cooperatives, branch banks, statewide associations and agencies or even denominational offices for "seed" money to start getting underwriting for a training session. You have to ask and ask again and then maybe ask one more time!