



# VISIONS

## FROM THE HEARTLAND

A Publication of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development

Fall/Winter 2000



Rural and urban retreat participants work together addressing shared issues and concerns.

## Rural and Urban Retreat Creates “Connections”

Fifty rural and urban community developers from 12 states and the District of Columbia met late in 1999 to participate in “Strengthening the Rural-Urban Connection,” a roundtable retreat, sponsored by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development. The event was part of a three-year program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

A Kellogg Foundation grant supported the retreat held at the Arbor Day Farm Lied Conference Center in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Work sessions paired leaders from cities such as Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Detroit and St. Louis with practitioners from communities as small as Mentor, Minnesota, with a population of 94.

The purpose of the retreat was to provide a forum for dialogue and to encourage the formation of peer networks among rural and urban practitioners for increased understanding and collaboration. The facilitated discussions focused on several key themes:

- Identifying common rural and urban issues
- Sharing successful elements of rural and urban community development strategies
- Exploring ways to align rural and urban agendas in the policy making arena
- Developing action steps for rural-urban collaboration

Early on, the participants discovered that rural and urban leaders share many of the same concerns, but in most cases, they have few opportunities to share solutions to common challenges facing their respective communities.

“We tend to focus on our own communities because of the magnitude and the urgency of problems there,” said one participant. “It has been interesting to learn that those from rural communities feel just as passionately as we do in the inner-city about similar issues. This establishes a common frame of reference, and we can use this to influence public policy.” Interestingly, the most frequently identified issues and concerns of the rural and urban practitioners were nearly parallel:

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## Team Discounts, Scholarships Offered

We are proud to announce a youth scholarship and group discounts for our two annual trainings in Jackson Hole, Wyoming; *Skill-Building for Stronger Communities* and *Helping Small Town Succeed*.

Individuals 25 years of age or younger are eligible for a tuition scholarship of \$400. These scholarships are supported by foundation grants and gifts from friends of the Heartland Center. The Heartland Center is also offering a 10% discount off the tuition fee for groups of three or more who register together.

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development will hold its Eighth Annual Jackson Hole Institute for Community Development Professionals and Practitioners: *Helping Small Towns Succeed*, October 19-23, 2000 and the Fourth Annual Advanced Skills Training: *Skill-Building for Stronger Communities*, May 17-20, 2000. Both are held at Snow King Resort, Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

If you wish to apply for scholarship assistance, contact the Heartland Center for Leadership Development at (402) 474-7667 or 1-800-927-1115 for a Scholarship Application Form. Your application will be reviewed promptly. Scholarship funds are limited. ■

## In This Issue

Joe Luther, a professor of community and regional planning at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), gives us his *Long View on Community Development*.

The Heartland Center announces the Nette Nelson Memorial Scholarship Fund. The fund will provide financial assistance to community leaders attending Heartland Center workshops and institutes.



## Heartland Center Project Briefs

### Empowering Neighborhood People (ENP)

This program provides training to neighborhood leaders in the Washington, D.C., area and results in locally initiated projects for neighborhood betterment. This program has been offered since 1994 with The Johns Hopkins University.

### Helping Small Towns Succeed

This is the Heartland Center's annual five-day training program of shared learning, networking and professional development for community development professionals and practitioners. Next program dates in Jackson Hole, Wyoming: October 19-23, 2000.

### Managing Information with Rural America (MIRA)

Managing Information with Rural America is a W.K. Kellogg Foundation initiative designed to help rural people to use information systems and technologies as a tool to meet current and future challenges. The Heartland Center is providing evaluation and technical assistance to the clusters of community teams at six sites nationally.

### National Rural Development Partnership

The Heartland Center is completing a contract to provide staff support and technical assistance to the National Rural Development Partnership. The role of the Heartland Center has focused on the development of various publications; retreats for state Rural Development Councils; several evaluation projects, and management of a national conference.

### North 27<sup>th</sup> Street Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan

The Heartland Center's approach to capacity building and leadership development is being used to sustain and improve the diverse and growing neighborhood along the 27<sup>th</sup> Street corridor in Lincoln, Nebraska. This is one phase of the overall redevelopment plan coordinated by the City's Department of Urban Development.

### Skill-Building for Stronger Communities

This is our annual Heartland Center four-day training program offered to the graduates of *Helping Small Towns Succeed* or

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## Fluharty Joins Heartland Center Board

Charles W. (Chuck) Fluharty, executive director of the Rural Policy Research Center (RUPRI), has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Heartland Center. Located at the University of Missouri, Columbia campus, RUPRI is a multi-state center developing research impacting on policy options affecting rural development issues of all types. Fluharty is recognized nationally as one of the nation's leading thinkers on emerging trends and issues affecting rural economies and rural quality of life.

Carol Peak has been elected as vice president of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development Board of Directors.

Board member Craig Schroeder has been named as executive director of the Nebraska Rural Development Commission. Schroeder was formerly a rural development specialist in Cambridge,

Nebraska.

Members of the Heartland Center for Leadership Board of Directors include Peter Bleed, professor of anthropology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Cornelia Butler Flora, director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development; Larry Dlugosh, chair of the department of educational administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Gordon Goodwin, vice president of the Rural Development and Finance Corporation; Carol Peak, associate director of the Kansas Center for Rural Initiatives; Craig Schroeder, executive director of the Nebraska Rural Development Commission; Elaine Stuhr, a Nebraska state senator and farmer from Bradshaw, Nebraska; Jose Zapata, executive director of Central Nebraska Community Services, and Charles Fluharty, executive director of the Rural Policy Research Center (RUPRI). ■

## Rural and Urban Retreat Creates "Connections"

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### Rural Issues

Loss of local control of capital  
Lost sense of community  
Incorporating and appreciating diversity  
Education  
Access to support programs

### Urban Issues

Lack of access to capital  
Need to strengthen citizenship  
Racism and environmental racism  
Education  
Lack of support services

Most participants agreed that the divisions between rural and urban communities diminish their political voice, and thus, their ability to influence policy. The group was especially worried about the growing concentration of power in the marketplace and its devastating effect on inner-city and rural economies. The group also discussed at great length the impact of institutional and internal racism as an overwhelming obstacle to creating just and equitable communities. On one occasion, these "big picture" topics engaged the group into the early hours of the morning. But many of those who shared the experience said it was well worth their time and loss of sleep.

"I was privileged to be among some of the most intelligent, articulate people interested in community development from diverse locations, races and cultures-very stimulating," commented one participant. "We in rural places struggle with many of the same issues that the inner-cities face. Together we can find more effective solutions."

Sharing information and forming cooperative working relationships are the first steps that retreat participants are taking to strengthen the rural-urban connection. Funding provided by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation is supporting the efforts of teams of practitioners who are expanding the rural and urban connection in Michigan, Ohio, Missouri and Illinois. The funding also supports a series of Rural-Urban Leadership Institutes in Oregon, Colorado, South Dakota, New York and Maine.

The Heartland Center is disseminating information through a new listserv and web page that links practitioners to one another, and to other development organizations working on similar initiatives worldwide. To subscribe to the listserv contact [owner-ruconnections@agmail.ag.iastate.edu](mailto:owner-ruconnections@agmail.ag.iastate.edu).

In the coming year, several states in the Southeast will join the program and participate in a second rural-urban retreat. For more information about Strengthening the Rural-Urban Connection, visit the new web page at [www.ruralurban.org](http://www.ruralurban.org). ■

## The Long View on Community Development

By Joseph Luther

On a Sunday afternoon this summer, I nodded to the moose on the wall and walked out of the Horseshoe Inn in Deweese, Nebraska. I stood on the porch and looked in both directions. I was



Joseph Luther

aware of the character and vitality of the town. I stepped down into the street and looked far out into the distance, trying to picture Deweese in future years. It was a long view.

I recalled standing on a similar roadway in a small town in Scotland a few years ago. What impressed me the most about that village was its antiquity. That village, that place stood for a thousand years. Enduring many challenges, the town persisted and survived. As a scholar dedicated to the future of small towns, I have been intrigued by the many stories of success and failure among all types of rural communities.

This locality known as Deweese is barely a hundred years old. I thought that a thousand years from now, this place will remain. But will the town we know as Deweese survive and persist? I tried to visualize this small rural community as it could appear in the long view. I tried to imagine coming back to the Horseshoe Inn in the year 2099.

So what about towns like Deweese? Beset by a fundamentally changed agricultural market, they are progressively impoverished. Undermined by buildings and infrastructure well beyond their life cycle, they are redlined by financial institutions and tormented by unfunded mandates. Abandoned by railroads and post offices, deserted by local businesses, for-

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## Heartland Center Project Briefs

for those with five or more years experience in the community development profession. Next program dates in Jackson Hole, Wyoming: May 17-20, 2000.

### Diversity as Opportunity Training

The Heartland Center led two community leadership workshops in Schuyler, Nebraska, in November and December. Approximately 70 persons participated in sessions on recruiting and retaining leaders, diversity as opportunity and citizen participation. Olga Sánchez, a English/Spanish educator, co-facilitated the workshops and provided translation for bilingual and Spanish speaking participants. Nearly one-fourth of Schuyler's population of about 5,000 is comprised of Latino citizens. Funding for the workshop series was provided by the Union Pacific Foundation and Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc.

### Standing Bear Lake

The Heartland Center, in partnership with Olsson Environmental Sciences, Inc., is in the final stages of a strategic planning process with the City of Omaha Parks, Recreation & Public Property to develop a community-based watershed management plan for Standing Bear Lake.

### Strengthening the Rural-Urban Connection

This initiative addresses the need for exploration of more cross-overs in both model development and service delivery among rural and urban communities. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; partners include the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development and the Southern Rural Development Center, along with several urban partners. See [www.ruralurban.org](http://www.ruralurban.org).

### W.K. Kellogg Collection: Rural Community Development Resources

The purpose of the Collection is primarily to gather in one place all types of resources used in rural community development projects that might serve as examples of program approaches or sources of innovation. Developed in partnership with the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. See [www.unl.edu/kellogg/index.html](http://www.unl.edu/kellogg/index.html). ■

## Nette Nelson Scholarship Fund Established

When someone we care about dies suddenly it is more difficult, because we don't have the chance to say good-bye. Friends and associates of the Heartland Center were shocked and saddened when Nette Nelson died suddenly of a heart attack on December 6, 1998 at age 59. Nette was a founding member of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, and served on our Board of Directors for 13 years. Nette Nelson devoted most of her adult life to helping people build better communities. She valued people. And whether she was serving as a volunteer for the YWCA in her home town of Lincoln, Nebraska, or working with emerging organizations in former Soviet bloc countries, she believed in the power of self-determination and grassroots leadership.

To honor Nette Nelson and her lifelong work in community development, the

Heartland Center Board of Directors has established the Nette Nelson Memorial Scholarship Fund. The fund will provide financial assistance to community leaders attending Heartland Center workshops and institutes such as *Helping Small Towns Succeed* and *Skill-Building for Stronger Communities*.

Please join us in celebrating the life of Nette Nelson by enabling others to carry out her life's work. Your gift will provide grassroots leaders the training they need to get the job done. For all of us who knew and loved Nette, it's the perfect way to say, "Good-bye."

Contributions to the Nette Nelson Scholarship Fund can be sent to the  
Heartland Center  
for Leadership Development  
Attn: Nette Nelson Scholarship Fund  
941 "O" St, Suite 920  
Lincoln, NE, 68508



## The Long View on Community Development

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saken by their youth, and grimly facing the "gray dawn" of an aging population, these rural small towns have been pilloried by sensationalized accounts of their imminent demise.

It is small wonder that, for the residents who love these communities, life at the edge of millennium is fast approaching TEOTWAWKI - The End of the World as We Know It.

Looking over the conceptual terrain of the future Great Plains, I am intrigued by what Ursula Le Guin described as the "archaeology of the future" - an attempt to discern the cultural contours of a society in the far future (Hicks, 1998). This begs the question of whether we are willing to make a great transition in our thinking about the future of our communities.

Rather than reacting to a vision based on trend extrapolation, can we imagine a long-term future that is preferred, even desired within the next 100 years? As Vicki Robin (1999) has said, "We should be running to a desirable future as we would run to meet our lover."

Quite simply, I believe we have been

asking the wrong question regarding the future of small rural towns. We have been asking "who goes" rather than "what can we do?" Long-view planning for a desired future seeks to create a shared vision of a preferred community and then works to create the strategy to achieve that vision. This logic is what is called *The Art of Solving the Right Problem* (Mitroff, 1998).

Choosing the future a community prefers is a significant act of local self-determination. As Donella H. Meadows (1999) said, "What a huge difference it makes in world view, in empowerment, in responsibility, in self-identity ... if we think of the future as something not to be predicted, but to be chosen."

Surely building community capacity is central to the concept of the long view. But capacity for what? Capacity to take action to improve and sustain the community. And in practical terms, that means conducting self-assessments, holding meetings, engaging residents in decisions and creating public, shared goals.

Goals, being long-range and general,

are pretty axiomatic. In this case, survival itself seems appropriate. The concept of sustainable improvement in the quality of life should become the central focus for decision-making in Nebraska. In the long view, sustainable development, and ultimately survival, requires not a 10- or 20-year horizon, but a truly long look into the future. This is why we are educating community planners at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Recalling that village in Scotland and understanding sense of place to me means planning for the next 100 years. It means choosing the preferred future for towns like Deweese. ■

*This article is reprinted, with permission from Nebraska Magazine, a publication of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Alumni Association. Joseph Luther is a professor of community and regional planning in the UNL College of Architecture.*



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

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