

Fall 2003/Winter 2004

# VISIONS



## Youth Attraction as a Rural Community Goal

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A publication of the  
Heartland Center for  
Leadership Development

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Home Town  
Competitiveness  
Learn how to revitalize your  
community through leadership,  
entrepreneurship, philanthropy  
and youth attraction.

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Attracting Youth  
and Young Families

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Community Building  
A new Heartland Center publication  
for practitioners in rural communities

Hold These Dates!  
Energizing  
Entrepreneurship  
in Rural America  
March 23-26, 2004



**VISIONS**  
from the  
Heartland

*VISIONS from the Heartland*  
is published three times a year by the

**Heartland Center for  
Leadership Development**

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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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## “Helping Small Towns” on the Road

The Heartland Center delivered a three-day version of its internationally known *Helping Small Towns Succeed* institute to 30 community development specialists employed by the Great Lakes Rural Community Assistance Program. The institute, held in Indianapolis, Indiana,

drew from the Heartland Center’s annual fall program, which was first offered in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 1992. Since then, nearly 1000 people have participated in the program in Wyoming and other sites around the country.

The institute curriculum covers such topics as Clues to Rural Community Survival, Dealing with Change, Marketing Your Community, Skills for Strategic

Planning, and Managing Community Conflict. The curriculum has been adapted numerous times for targeted audiences under sponsorship of groups such as the Great Lakes RCAP.

Heartland Center Co-Director Milan Wall and Gordon Goodwin, a Heartland Center Board member and an independent community development and business-planning consultant in San Antonio, Texas, facilitated the Indianapolis institute.

## Rural Funders Retreat to Nebraska City

The Heartland Center provided facilitation and documentation assistance to the National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC) at its second annual assembly, held in early September in Nebraska City, Nebraska. NRFC is a private-public partnership leveraging more than \$100 million over ten years to support rural communities and families facing persistent poverty. Twelve private foundations,

three federal agencies, and seven on-the-ground regional collaborations comprise the NRFC, which was founded two years ago.

The Heartland Center is a partner in one of the seven regional collaborations along with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and the Nebraska Community Foundation.

At this year’s assembly, held at the Arbor Day Lodge in rural southeast Nebraska, Heartland Center

Co-Director Milan Wall facilitated regional breakout sessions, and three graduate students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, including former Heartland Center intern Aditya Peri, transcribed key sessions during each of the assembly’s three days.

Nearly 150 attended the assembly, representing eight states and traveling from as far as Hawaii and Alaska.



Rural funders and practitioners met to build capacity and measure performance during the second cycle of their funding initiative for rural communities.



Participants at our annual Jackson Hole Helping Small Towns Succeed Institute practice the "Heartland Center Handshake."

## Welcome, Betty!

Betty Ourecky has joined the Heartland staff as our new business manager. Betty previously served as controller for the Farmers Union Coop Supply in Beatrice, Nebraska. In her spare time Betty enjoys taking classes in everything from cooking to accounting, reading and spending time with her four grandchildren.



Betty Ourecky

# New Academy for Home Town Competitiveness

February 24-26, 2004

The Heartland Center is excited to announce its new academy, **Home Town Competitiveness**, for community builders focusing on rural leadership, entrepreneurship, philanthropy and youth attraction—February 24-26 in Omaha, Nebraska.

Our new training program is an outgrowth of our collaborative work with the Rural Policy Research Institute Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and the Nebraska Community Foundation. Over the past year

and a half, our partnership has worked on a pilot project supported by the National Rural Funders Collaborative in Valley County, Nebraska, with a population of 4,647. For some, Valley County is the perfect picture of a declining Great Plains community—losing people, jobs, and intergenerational assets to more urban areas.

The county's leadership, however, is determined to reverse these trends and is utilizing an integrated approach to address the challenges they face. Efforts include

leadership and community capacity building, entrepreneurship support, youth involvement, and cultivating local philanthropy.

A major shift in attitudes occurred when the initiative's local leaders began to think strategically about their county's wealth transfer estimates provided by the Nebraska Community Foundation. Within the next decade in Valley County alone, nearly \$130 million in assets will transfer from the older to the younger generation. Like thousands of rural communities, vast inherited assets will pass to heirs who now live in urban areas.

Millions of dollars are being literally exported out of rural America at an alarming rate. A key strategy for local leaders, therefore, is to "capture" just a small portion—usually targeted at 5%—of the intergenerational wealth transfer, and to hold these assets as community endowed funds. The principal remains untouched while the earned interest can fuel future community building efforts.

The Home Town Competitiveness approach doesn't stop with just raising money. The next critical strategy is to invest that money in efforts that will regenerate the local economy, and provide a reason for hometown kids to remain in or return to their community as adult entrepreneurs, wage earners and, of course, families. The strategic model involves a continuous loop of leadership development, encouraging philanthropy, entrepreneurship support, and youth attraction.

**There is still much to be learned, however, we believe it is imperative that we share what we already know.**



Jeff Yost of the Nebraska Community Foundation, Nancy Glaubke, Valley County Planning Administrator, and Bettie Hodges of the National Rural Funders Collaborative.

**Valley County is succeeding. They have actually exceeded their goal of retaining 5% of the area's 10-year wealth transfer. Their current and expected endowment has grown to \$6.7 million dollars.**

Our model is attracting national attention among community practitioners and theorists who have rejected cookie cutter solutions to rural decline and are focusing on place-based economic development approaches. There is still much to be learned, however, we believe it is imperative that we share what we already know. Please watch for registration details on our website at [www.heartlandcenter.info](http://www.heartlandcenter.info) and in numerous other vehicles, such as association newsletters and list serves. But do hold these dates: February 24-26, in Omaha, Nebraska.

# Youth Attraction as a Rural Community Goal

## Developing Realistic Goals for Re-Population

Like most of his high school classmates who graduated from high school in Holbrook, Nebraska, in the 1980s, Craig Schroeder left town to attend college in an urban area. Craig majored in Ag Economics/Rural Community Development and, like many of his rural peers, he was an above average student. Craig, however, is an exception to the educated rural youth paradigm: Craig returned to Holbrook to pursue a career and start a family.

Holbrook is located in Furnas County, in southwest Nebraska. Between 1990 and 2000 the county's population declined from 5,553 to 5,324—a net loss of 229 people. Most people living in low-density counties may interpret these numbers as painful indicators of youth out-migration and aging population—seemingly irreversible trends that are leading to the slow death of small towns all across the Great Plains. Craig Schroeder, however, is challenging rural leaders to think differently and to take action to reverse the youth out-migration trend, and thereby also the aging of rural communities.

Schroeder is now a senior associate with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and the former director of the Nebraska Rural Development Commission. Much of his current work focuses on changing the attitudes of rural community leaders regarding the loss of its youth and young families.

“People who live in places like Furnas County too often think there is little they can do to impact the trends of the last 80 years and prevent their town from dying. But that’s not the case,” says Schroeder.

Schroeder believes that we need a new way to talk to communities and leaders, and he has devised a straightforward formula for determining how many young people must be attracted back to a county to mitigate population decline. To illustrate, he uses the following example based on a 10-year population change of - 6.9%, which is average for a town of 1,000 in western Nebraska.

**1,000 (population) x 6.9% (rate of loss)  
= 69 people net loss over 10 years**

**69 people divided by 10 years  
= 6.9 people net loss per year**

**The goal then is to attract an additional  
7 young people each year over the next decade.**

Although these numbers are easier to conceptualize, many rural leaders may still be discouraged. Why would young people want to come back or stay? Where are seven new, good jobs going to come from—each and every year for the next decade?

Schroeder, however, explains that youth attraction goals are actually more achievable when overlaid on real-life demographics. Young people leave town as



singles, but they often return as young married people who, on the average, will eventually have two children, according to actual census data. This cuts the attraction goal from seven to only two or three high school graduates per year.

“If a community of 1,000 understands that they need to get only two or three kids to return to the community—with their spouses and children—the community can mitigate population decline. Attract six or seven kids, and the community actually experiences a modest sustained growth of 2%,” Schroeder says.

“When community leaders see this as a doable goal, they must then begin to develop strategies to make it happen,” he says.

Schroeder suggests a number of ways communities can respond to the challenge of retaining and attracting young people and families:

- Target specific young people before they are juniors or seniors in high school—the earlier the better.
- Find out what their aspirations are. Develop personal relationships with adult mentors and use peer networks to connect youths with young adults who have recently made the decision to return to the community.
- Deal at the micro level, not the macro level. When we make presentations to an entire student body at an assembly in a high school gym, that’s the macro level and it has little impact.
- Replace negative attitudes and peer pressure to leave with positive encouragement, tools and resources to help young people create their own careers locally through entrepreneurial enterprise.

### With Appreciation...

The Heartland Center wishes to express our gratitude for the support we received from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation this past summer, which helps to support our continuing work in the areas of rural philanthropy, entrepreneurship and youth attraction.

## Challenging the 'Best and Brightest' Myth

Generally, teachers, counselors and the whole educational system in low-density counties do an excellent job at focusing on and encouraging A and B students. These are precisely the students who are most likely to leave their communities and not return. The C, D, and F students are not expected to do as well, maintains Craig Schroeder. However, these are the students who are more likely to remain in the community and, consequently, become its future leaders.

Schroeder recognizes a fortunate twist to this scenario: There is evidence that most C and D, and even F, students are those who may likely have entrepreneurial traits.

"They tend to break the mold," he says. "They don't always conform. They don't automatically accept one right answer. They can be creative thinkers and often are better at hands-on vocational applications than academics. Yes, the pursuit of academic performance is important, but it is sometimes said that A students end up working for B and C students. We need to look at these kids in a new way with a different value perspective. I believe our rural communities have a lot of talented potential entrepreneurs who just need the right kind of encouragement and support."

"Youth attraction will need to be based within formal economic development, social service and educational systems if it is to really have a widespread and long-lasting effect," says Schroeder. "This holistic approach is necessary. Currently, many youths tell me they only get negative attention in their rural communities. To them it appears that unless they are exceptional at sports, the only thing adults seem to talk about is kids driving up and down main street or hanging out and causing problems. Most young people are good kids, but they get off to a bad start with adults from the beginning and often there is little done to change this relationship before they graduate from high school.

"There also can be an overwhelming negative attitude among adults in these struggling communities that influences youth attitudes. Far too many declining rural communities are suffering from a sort of communal cancer. They are resigned to the belief that they are experiencing a slow, sometimes painful, unavoidable death. The problem is this negative attitude is picked up by our young people in a way that leads them to assume that there are no opportunities for them there," Schroeder says.

"Think of it this way. If a stockbroker advised you to hold on to a portfolio based on companies that he predicted were in a state of steady decline and were doomed to slowly go out of business, wouldn't you be looking elsewhere for financial advice? Is it any wonder kids are anxious to leave when adults tell them there is no future for them here?"

We need to start from where we are and build upon our assets, realizing we are in a new type of economy and undergoing societal changes for which rural communities have a great deal to offer young people today."

When Craig Schroeder talks about sustaining rural population he talks about youth attraction rather than retention. Schroeder believes that it is good for young people to go out and get an education, develop experience, and new ideas, contacts and resources...and then bring their talents and resources back to their rural communities.

"We need to encourage our young people to go out and spread their wings, but also make it possible for them to come home again when it's time to roost," Schroeder says. "We need to reach out to kids early, here at home, when they're just learning to fly. The adults who are there to encourage kids to test themselves, and help them up again when they fall—these are the people who will be remembered with fondness when a young person begins to think about settling down. There are several things that make coming home attractive to young people. First, the belief that the community cares and supports them. Second, economic opportunity. And finally, quality of life—good schools, health care, recreation. They're also looking for ways to move their career out of the city, or take over or start a family business. Communities that address these needs are attractive to a growing number of young people.

"Sometimes it is little things that make a big difference. For example, why not throw a community-wide welcome home party when a young family moves in. When I moved home I heard repeatedly, 'Craig you are a bright young person with a college degree. We think there are greater opportunities for you elsewhere.' But I did not want to be 'elsewhere' anymore. I wanted to come home to the community that had done so much for me as a young person. I hope in some small way I was able to do that."

Craig Schroeder is a Senior Associate with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and serves as President of the Heartland Center Board of Directors.

You may contact him at 402.423.8788 or craigs@neb.rr.com

### 13 Reasons for Attracting Youth and Young Families

1. Young people can have a three to one (3:1) impact on population and out-migration.
2. Young families have children in school, which impacts public funding for education.
3. Young people have long-term business development and career goals.
4. Young families are establishing themselves and buy substantial retail goods.
5. Young families use health care services and often have private insurance.
6. Young people bring new energy, ideas, and leadership to the community.
7. Young people are likely IT savvy and can help transform the local economy.
8. By retaining youth a community also retains generational wealth.
9. Young people provide needed labor to current, expanding, and new businesses.
10. Educated youths who move to a rural community potentially earn higher than average wages.
11. Young people who return to a rural community will often respect traditional rural values and fit well into the community.
12. Young families use and support community institutions such as churches and libraries.
13. Young people who have experiences outside the community often bring new skills, attitudes, resources and contacts to the community when they return.



## Developing Models for Youth Attraction

In southwest Nebraska, the Youth Entrepreneur Partnership (YEP) has the dual purpose of curbing out-migration and developing new businesses. They are targeting kids who are in the 7th and 8th grade. Due to severe drought and continuing economic hardship in the region, YEP organizers felt that they had to launch the program as quickly as possible, even if they were able to recruit only two youngsters during the first year. Instead, the partnership served 17 youths during its initial year, and is now expanding into more communities.

The YEP is a product of groundbreaking work by the Nelson Institute working in concert with the Southwest Nebraska RC&D, Mid-Plains Community College—McCook, Nebraska Development Network Regional Group and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. The focus of YEP is to help youths and adults work together to create a more robust local economy and community, and thereby develop greater opportunities for young people to stay or return to the community or region. The program encourages youths and adults to work together as a team, and provides young people the tools

necessary to create employment and business opportunities while working with adults to improve their community and build self-esteem through community service.

YEP is an intensive four-year commitment to youths that provides entrepreneurship training, micro lending, job shadowing, business planning, business opportunities, technical assistance, generational business transfer, and community service. Perhaps most importantly, the program engages adults as positive role models and mentors for young people.

## Strengthening Local Leadership II Hold These Dates!

Year two of the leadership training program supported by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines drew to a close in October with a workshop in Mille Lacs, Minnesota, for teams from seven communities, including the White Earth Reservation. Vicki Luther and Milan Wall conducted the workshop, which featured state resource staff from SBA, USDA-Rural Development, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund and the state agency for economic development.

Other topics included conflict management, marketing your community and a discussion on rural policy. This workshop series has also been presented in Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota and Missouri for teams that had attended the first year workshops in 2002. The two-year program is based on a curriculum developed and delivered by Heartland Center staff. According to Milan, "The second year program was developed based on evaluations and interviews with participants. It's a program that's very responsive to the needs of small town leaders."

The Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines plans to offer Strengthening Local Leadership again next year. For more information, contact Kevin Welsh at 800-544-3452 or check out the FHLB-Des Moines web site at [www.fhlbdm.com](http://www.fhlbdm.com).



### **Energizing Entrepreneurship in Rural America**

*March 23-26, 2004*

The second annual E<sup>2</sup> academy will be held in Nebraska City, Nebraska, on March 23 through March 26, 2004. Last spring we had to close registration early when more than 50 persons applied for this high-energy event that is designed with a train-the-trainers focus. The Heartland Center will be teaming up once again with the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (CRE) to develop and deliver the curriculum. We strongly encourage participation by community teams of two or more people.

**Energizing Entrepreneurship in Rural America** is designed as a train-the-trainers program. It includes a multi-day academy that provides practitioners with practical tools for focusing on entrepreneurship as a rural development approach. The program includes educational materials for trainers and trainees that can be downloaded from a secure Internet site.

Support for this program is provided in part by The Coleman Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation.

Watch for registration details on our web site at [www.heartlandcenter.info](http://www.heartlandcenter.info) and at CRE's site at [www.ruraleship.org](http://www.ruraleship.org). We will also be utilizing numerous list serves to provide registration information. So mark your calendars and keep in touch!

## New publication from the Heartland Center for Leadership Development

### **Your Field Guide to Community Building**

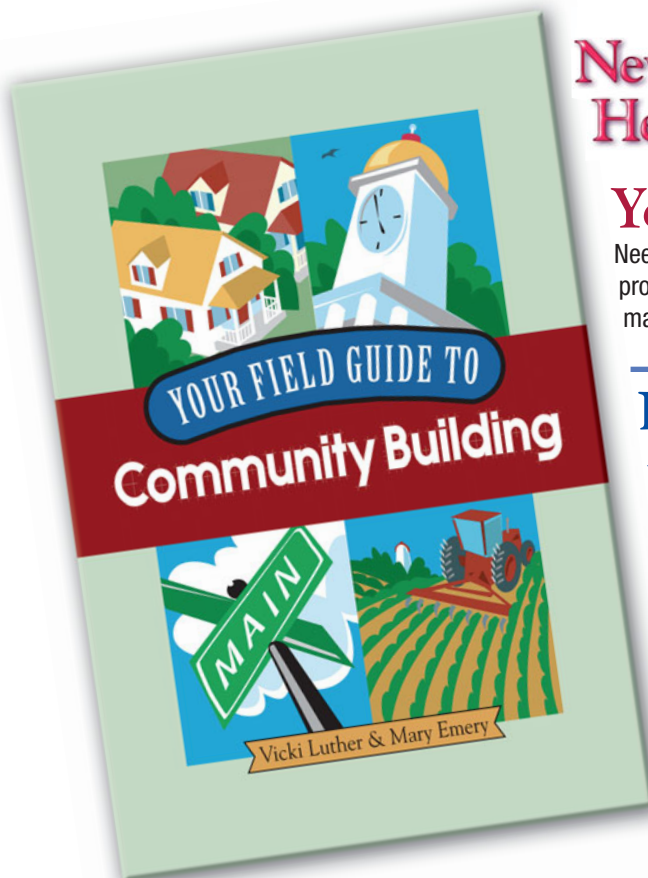
Need some inspiration to keep your community work fresh and interesting? How about a tune up on solving problems with groups and community projects? This new publication from Vicki Luther and Mary Emery may be the answer. *Your Field Guide to Community Building* follows a familiar step-by-step approach to

### **Filled with interviews with practitioners, resources and an interactive learning tool**

forming a group and initiating a project and includes troubleshooting suggestions, reminders of techniques and how to adapt them, plus anecdotes from nearly 40 other experienced community builders.

Included with the publication is a compact disk filled with interviews with practitioners, resources and an interactive learning tool on working with community groups. *Your Field Guide to Community Building* sells for \$18.50 including shipping and handling costs.

The publication can be purchased on line at [www.heartlandcenter.info](http://www.heartlandcenter.info) or by calling the Heartland Center at 1-800-927-1115.



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

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Postage and handling are included in the price of the publication for orders within the U.S. and Canada. Cost of publication to be paid in U.S. dollars. (Prices subject to change without notice.)

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# Calendar

## November

### Stevens Creek Watershed Basin Planning

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Vicki Luther facilitates city and county planning efforts

### Community Development Society

Cleveland, Ohio  
Mary Emery participates at the association's quarterly meeting

### Great Neighborhoods!

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Topics include Building Media Relationships and Partnering with City Hall

### Hitachi Foundation

Washington, DC  
Vicki Luther, Reshell Ray and Milan Wall facilitate the annual institute for grantees

## December

### Partnership Cross Training

Council Bluffs, Iowa  
Heartland Center staff join members of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship and the Nebraska Community Foundation to share knowledge and skills for collaborative projects

### Annual Meeting

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Heartland Center Board members meet

### Watershed Basin Planning

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Vicki Luther facilitates citizen advisory groups

### Great Neighborhoods!

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Topics for this final session include Vision into Action and Fund-Raising Strategies

## January

### Stevens Creek Watershed Basin Planning

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Vicki Luther facilitates citizen advisory groups

### National Rural Funders Collaborative

Milan Wall participates in capacity building and performance measurement

## February

### Home Town Competitiveness

Omaha, Nebraska  
Milan Wall and Mary Emery train community builders in rural leadership, entrepreneurship, philanthropy and youth attraction

### Together for Kids

Lincoln, Nebraska  
Vicki Luther facilitates planning for the Nebraska State Early Childhood Comprehensive System

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8 FALL 2003/WINTER 2004

VISIONS from the Heartland

## Ask The Heartland Center

### Question:

I have a hard time deciding how long to let a group discuss a question or how to cover all the agenda items in a meeting that I'm facilitating. Any ideas?

### Milan Wall

*Co-Director*

You can make a judgment on the importance of the topic by looking at the entire agenda. For example, spending 20 minutes of an hour-long meeting deciding the date for the next gathering is probably out of line! However, an important topic such as setting a goal for a project should take that much time. As the meeting proceeds, the facilitator may need to suggest a specific time frame to guide discussion. Interestingly, people will usually get more accomplished if you give them a limited time to work on a topic.



### Vicki Luther

*Co-Director*

One dimension that helps the facilitator decide when to make a transition is the balance of participation from the group. By the time the meeting is over, every voice should be heard. If the discussion has lasted so long that comments have turned into speeches, you might try a group survey and ask each person for a one-sentence comment. Another good technique is to recruit a member to serve as timekeeper for the group and ask for reminders on how much time is left.



### Mary Emery

*Senior Program Associate*

Sometimes putting the simple and quick decisions at the front of the meeting will help you to place the emphasis correctly. You can also suggest a time frame for each item and check that with the group when you review the agenda topics. Let the group help to determine how long a discussion will last.



### Leon Sharpe

*Program Associate*

Make sure that you're scanning the group to check body language. Group members will demonstrate the level of interest in the topic by facial expressions and posture. If you can't make eye contact with folks in the group, it may be time to move the agenda along to a new topic.

