

## **Entrepreneurial Rural Communities National Case Studies Series**

Eight case studies of entrepreneurial rural communities and a summary report have been developed from presentations and discussions at a National Entrepreneurial Rural Communities Workshop held in Fairfield, Iowa, on June 3, 2005. The series includes:

Report 1: The Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet) in Athens, Ohio

Report 2: Northern Initiatives in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

Report 3: *Tapetes de Lana* Weaving Center, Mora, New Mexico

### **Report 4: Douglas-Coffee County, Georgia: An Entrepreneur-Friendly Community**

Report 5: The IDEA Center Incubator of Tupelo, Mississippi

Report 6: North Iowa Area Community College Entrepreneur and Capital Networks

Report 7: AgVentures Alliance: An Entrepreneurial Value-Added Agriculture Network

Report 8: Fairfield, Iowa: The Emergence of a Serial Entrepreneurial Community

Report 9: Reflections on Local, State and Federal Policies to Support Entrepreneurs

Supplement: *"Entrepreneurial Community Ecosystems..."* by Sohodojo

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*A Report Prepared by the*

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The National Entrepreneurial Rural Communities Workshop and Case Study Project was sponsored by Farm Foundation. The case studies were edited by Sue Lambertz, Sandra Burke, Becky Johnson, and Mark Edelman of the Community Vitality Center, Iowa State University. The workshop was organized by Burt Chojnowski, past President of Fairfield Entrepreneurs Association. Companion PowerPoint presentations are available for download from the CVC web site: [www.cvcia.org](http://www.cvcia.org). Video excerpts recorded by Fairfield Public Access Community television (FPAC) and are being made available at <http://www.brainbelt.com>.

## **Report 4: Douglas-Coffee County – One of Georgia’s Most Entrepreneur-Friendly Communities**

by Lidell Greenway, Economic Development Assistant for Entrepreneurship, and JoAnne Lewis, President of Douglas-Coffee County Chamber and Economic Development Authority

“If we announced a new industry was coming to town creating 240 new jobs, it would be very exciting,” says Lidell Greenway, Economic Development Assistant for Entrepreneurship at the Douglas-Coffee County Chamber and Economic Development Authority, “and that’s how many jobs we’ve created in one year with our entrepreneurship initiative.”

Entrepreneur and small business development is big business in the city of Douglas and in Coffee County, Georgia. Douglas was the first rural city in Georgia to undergo a readiness review through the State’s Entrepreneurial Network (ENet) and to meet the “Entrepreneur Friendly Community” standards developed by Georgia Tech’s Economic Development Institute for the Georgia Department of Economic Development. The assessment is designed to assist rural communities to become ready with entrepreneurial support programs and infrastructure. Based on the outcomes of the assessment, the state team makes recommendations for new programs the community can implement.

Energized by the process, JoAnne Lewis, President of Douglas Coffee County Chamber and Economic Development Authority literally got on her knees and begged the county supervisors to provide the funding to create an entrepreneurial support initiative for the Chamber/EDA and to hire a staff person to manage it. “I couldn’t have done that without a good relationship with our elected officials,” says Lewis. “Those relationships with your elected officials are so important. We make sure we give every photo opportunity to our elected officials so it’s their faces in the papers taking credit for any good thing going on in our community.”

It hadn’t been that long ago when Douglas and Coffee County were in a slump. They were experiencing very slow to no job growth. Many of the good jobs in the rural Southeast were headed off-shore. “At that time we had a very narrow vision of the Chamber’s role. We had to change the way we did things,” says Lewis. “So when the state announced their new entrepreneur and small business development program, we knew we needed to align ourselves with what the state was doing because we needed their resources.”

With the assessment completed and the staff person (Lidell Greenway) hired, they created a “How to Start and Grow a Business” publication, available in print, on their website, by CD-ROM, and by email. “We wanted to get it into as many hands as possible,” explains Greenway. “Our goal was to demonstrate to the community that we were serious about stimulating entrepreneurship and small business.”

Their efforts also included creating equitable tax incentives for both traditional industry prospects and small business entrepreneurs, such as tax abatement. They developed an informal “retail” incubator where potential retailers can lease space month to month to test their idea. If they find the concept has a market, the new business leases permanent space and opens their business.

“What’s helped us is we reviewed where we were and recognized the reality of how we could maintain and grow our local economy,” says Lewis. The Chamber/EDA designed an “Economic Gardening” theme and heavily promoted the vision to the community. They made personal visits

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to their small businesses. They learned that entrepreneurs coming in the door needed services, “not an agent.”

Lewis and Greenway offered these recommendations to communities interested in energizing entrepreneurship:

- Secure a committed leadership team and foster new leadership to fill voids when an empty seat is open
- Identify local resources through asset mapping or some credible process
- Hire a staff person to support efforts to demonstrate commitment
- Develop a strategic plan and get the plan adopted by your partners
- Increase community awareness
- Monitor and track your efforts. Set a standard for tracking effectiveness and results.
- Evaluate ongoing interest and needs of entrepreneurs
- Recognize weakness and work with your strengths
- Be willing to take risks
- Keep local papers informed with stories of interest. Make sure your audience understands what you are doing
- Give the credit and the photo opportunities to the local politicians

“Government agencies at all levels have to make it a household word,” says Lewis. “Entrepreneurship needs to be fundamental.” Small business efforts have spurred larger projects. A new 8-screen cinema and a hotel with conference space are underway. The number of new jobs continues to grow.

“If you don’t tell your community what you are doing, they don’t know what you are doing,” says Lewis. “When the state does an article and mentions your name, you give that to everyone – build your local political capital!” She adds, “Success comes from talking about it!” JoAnne Lewis and Lidell Greenway are excited about entrepreneurship, and that enthusiasm is contagious, which is certainly a contributing factor to their success. Entrepreneurship is exciting, as Lewis and Greenway can attest.

**For more information in the Internet see:**

[www.douglasga.org/newBusiness.asp](http://www.douglasga.org/newBusiness.asp)

[www.georgia.org/esbd/community\\_based/index.asp](http://www.georgia.org/esbd/community_based/index.asp)

[www.georgiainnovation.org](http://www.georgiainnovation.org)