

## **Make This a Nice Place to Live as Well as Work**

Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg

Local Workforce Development Plan

It would be so easy to focus on development programs to train people to work with computers or work in fulfillment houses for mail-order catalog or Internet shoppers and just leave it at that. However, in dealing only with workforce programs an Extension community resource development agent might miss the bigger picture. Workforce development programs are only the tip of the iceberg. The larger, interconnecting issues are beneath the surface and they include but are not limited to the issue of developing a sense of community. Developing a sense of community has as some of its parts civic pride and a desire to establish root. My experience is that addressing more than one root cause simultaneously is the delicate juggling act required to impact workforce development. Every community requires programs to be customized thus a short description of Collier County and Immokalee is in order.

My home for the past twenty-six years has been a small rural community of 18,000 in northwest Collier County named Immokalee. Since 1975 I have been a county Extension Agent there beginning as a Home Economist assigned to working with the 150 predominantly Hispanic, with a handful of black, families living in Farmworker's Village. In working with these families, I very quickly became involved with issues outside of the family circle of influence, issues such as public education and crime. I became interested in developing the human capital needed to improve our community.

Collier County is the size of the state of Delaware and its predominant communities are along the platinum coast of Southwest Florida. 2000 census data shows Naples was the fastest growing

metropolitan area in the nation after Las Vegas. A gap exists between the monied coast where the average annual income is \$65,000 as compared to the wages of \$27,000 for predominantly service workers. In Immokalee 46% live below the poverty level. In the forty miles, that separates Naples from Immokalee there is also another major divide and that is language.

80% of the people living in Immokalee are Hispanic and 2/3rds of those speak English as a second language, or not at all. This has earned us the label of being "linguistically isolated". Another interesting fact about Immokalee is that the farm laborers who pick tomatoes, green peppers, cucumbers, squash, and watermelons from October through May are at its lowest estimate 60% illegal. The goal of many of these migrant farm workers is to live as cheaply as possible with as many as ten people in a trailer and send as much money as possible home to Mexico or Guatemala to support family and build homes there.

In a recent Business Retention Expansion & Visitation survey, which I will discuss in depth later, one of the most telling comparison of questions was a comparison of the overall opinion of Immokalee as a place to conduct business as compared to a place to live. On a five-point scale 10% felt it was a poor place to conduct business while 31% considered it a poor to very poor place to live. The basic irony of this is that in Seminole, Immokalee is translated to mean "my home", but is it "my home" and how can Immokalee become "my home" to its residents?

Seven programs supported by Extension help put the pieces of the puzzle together for Collier. They are: Harvest for Humanity and Jubilation, the Business Retention Expansion & Visitation project, The Empowerment Alliance of Southwest Florida, FastTrac, Learn to Lead, The Immokalee Foundation, and the Southwest Florida Alliance of Educational Leaders.

## **Harvest for Humanity**

The first program I want to highlight, Harvest for Humanity and Jubilation, is home grown. Immokalee's Harvest is an outgrowth of the widely recognized Habitat for Humanity model which began in Americus, Georgia. The mission of Harvest for Humanity, a not-for-profit 501©3 organization, is to create innovative solutions to the social and economic challenges faced by seasonal farmworker families. The vision is to empower farmworker families and the surrounding community to help bring about necessary changes and improvements; to develop and share the Harvest for Humanity model throughout rural America; and, to reinvent the paradigm for corporate farm ownership.

Richard and Florence Nogaj established Harvest for Humanity, Inc. in June 1998 to bring a new concept of farm ownership to Immokalee, Florida. Harvest is currently employing and training eight soon to be ten, full-time, salaried farmworkers. Employees will receive technical farm related training language and business classes. After an initial five-year training-period Harvest will sell the Harvest Farm to the farmworker employees using the concepts of an Employee Stock Option Plan and a no-profit, no-interest loan.

Harvest for Humanity is also committed to paying each employee a living wage that will empower men and women to adequately provide for their families. Using cause related marketing, consumers will be asked to pay a few more cents per ounce for their product that will go directly to the farmworker in the form of a living wage of at least \$8.50 per hour.

The housing companion to Harvest Farm is Jubilation, an affordable home ownership community. Elements of Jubilation include sharing; safe and central activities at a recreational facility; having regular homeowners meetings; learning and celebrating at fiestas and gatherings.

Living in Jubilation means social and business activities held at the Harvest Activity Center located at the Plaza with deed covenants will ensure attractive community life. The community will have a diversity of age, income, and ethnicity. Economic sustainability is planned through a blueberry U-Pick, blueberry store and landscape businesses. A Florida scrub jay preserve of 11.5 acres is dedicated to preservation goals and open to educational tours. In Jubilation the residents are consciously committed to living in harmony, sharing their talents, participating in community activities, and are being connected to each other in friendship. More about Harvest for Humanity's two programs, Harvest Farm and Jubilation can be found at their web site

<http://www.aboutharvest.org>.

## **BREV**

Next let's turn to a program that already has a national reputation and it is being implemented in Immokalee. That program is the Business Retention and Expansion Visitation or BR&E. A short review of its basic premise put its importance into perspective.

Why is business retention and expansion important? Isn't the attraction of new businesses the most widely recognized local economic development activity? Yes, however, it is not, nor should it be, the only activity to stimulate and promote local economic growth. Retention and expansion of the start-up of new businesses, are also key elements of an overall economic development strategy. In

Florida it is estimated that 80% of all job growth comes from existing businesses (Enterprise Florida). That's why Immokalee chose to organize a BREV effort

Immokalee's BRE Visitation program utilized local volunteers to make on-site visits to 100 existing businesses. These volunteers administered a questionnaire that was developed locally with the assistance of BR&E consultant, Hank Cothren, from campus. Volunteers were trained in the use of the survey instrument and, in teams of two, visited up to four businesses. This allowed the local community to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time with very little out-of-pocket expenses for data collection. A special feature of the Immokalee BR&E Visitation program was the incorporation of 31 high school students from the STAY program. These students who are "at risk" of dropping out of school received customized volunteer training and were matched with adult volunteers to complete a blitz visitation outreach over a three-day weekend.

The Immokalee BR&E program has five objectives which reflect the program's national focus:

1. Demonstrate that the community cares about and appreciates local firms.
2. Identify and help solve problems that area businesses are having.
3. Assist firms in using state programs.
4. Set priorities for long-range business retention and expansion efforts.
5. Build community capacity to sustain growth.

This program has wide support: Empowerment Alliance of Southwest Florida, Economic Development Council of Collier County, Collier County Public Schools, Immokalee Chamber of Commerce, Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board, and Collier County Cooperative Extension office.

As the completed surveys were returned, the leadership team reviewed each survey to identify issues of concern ("red flags") that could be addressed immediately. These concerns ranged from information requests to specific problems that were impacting the operation of business. Once the issues were identified, the leadership team met and members were assigned to handle these immediate follow-up requests.

The BR&E Leadership Team sent copies of the surveys to the University of Florida for tabulation and analysis. Hank Cothren and Steve Jacob tabulated the data, prepared summary data and general recommendations for the state research review team. A research review team consisting of representatives from the University of Florida, Enterprise Florida, USDA Rural Development, the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, the Collier County Economic Development Council, and Enterprise Alliance of Southwest Florida, reviewed the data and suggested strategies and actions for the local community. Hank Cothren and Steve Jacob then drafted a report for review by the Immokalee Leadership Team.

At retreat in August, the Immokalee Leadership Team set priorities for the projects it will undertake. The Leadership Team was free to adopt any or all of the projects recommended by the State Review Team, to revise these recommendations and then adopt them or to develop its own projects based on its review of the raw data. It was recommended that no project be adopted unless three members of the leadership team agree to see to its implementation. It is then the role of those agreeing to work to implement a project. At the conclusion of this retreat four teams were formed to initiate project implementation: Job skills, housing, community marketing, and infrastructure. A community milestone meeting is planned for October.

While BREV is a well researched process for which there is a step by step model, sometimes a community has to go for the “brass ring”. Applying for and receiving the USDA Round II Enterprise Community designation and funding was just that – a gamble that has paid off.

### **USDA Empowerment Zone**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Enterprise Community programs are ten-year grants in designated urban and rural communities to create economic self-sufficiency and improved quality of life for the area’s working poor.

On January 1, 1999 the Rural Federal Enterprise Community designation for the Empowerment Alliance of Southwest Florida was secured through a rigorous application process led by the Community Foundation and Collier and Hendry County Government. This grant offers \$250,000 per year for 10 years as seed money from USDA. Focus areas for the program have been identified as diversification of the economic base, creation of higher wage jobs, education and job training, affordable housing, and community image. In Round I, conducted in 1994, Immokalee applied and had been designated a Champion Community. But received no funding.

In addition, the Florida Empowerment Program, administered through the State Department of Community Affairs committed to provide up to \$225,000 annually to EASF as long as federal allocation is received. This program also allows the entire Enterprise Community area to be considered for rural funding, and to qualify for tax credits designed to stimulate economic revitalization to businesses of all sizes.

Locally, the Enterprise Community encompasses Immokalee; Harlem, Montura, South Clewiston and Hookers Point in Hendry County; and the Seminole Indian Tribe of Florida – Big Cypress and Immokalee Indian Reservations.

While the Community Foundation is the managing support organization, implementation is enabled by founding partners, including local social service agencies, county agencies, state agencies, education agencies, economic development agencies. A community-based advisory board provides on-going input and in the second year has organized a 501©3-community development corporation to directly administer programs.

In the first two years of operation, results have been significant. Every dollar received in Federal Enterprise Community Funding was leveraged by \$118 dollars in federal, state, and private funding for the four goals totaling \$29,255,834. Projects included sewer improvements, a one stop job service center, library renovations, and more.

For more information, contact Barbara Cacchione Enterprise Community Coordinator Empowerment Alliance of Southwest Florida of Collier County, at [bceasf@mediaone.net](mailto:bceasf@mediaone.net) or you may visit their web site at <http://www.naples.net/~eceasf>.

### **FastTrac**

FastTrac entrepreneurship education was a new to Extension program. As with any new program the first year required a substantial amount of time to legitimize and initiate. The second year was not quite as hard but required extra support time. The basis for beginning the program was that at

any given time , one in 10 U.S. adults is engaged in starting a business. More than 50% of our GNP comes from small business. More than 50% of our workforce is involved in some way in small business. Entrepreneurial activity has been linked to as much as 2/3 of the variation in regional employment growth in 394 designated US regions. And the failure rate of small business is notorious.

The Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, the largest organization focused solely on developing, supporting and encouraging Entrepreneurship education and research, funded the development and delivery of *FastTrac*, which is offered in the state of Florida through the University of Florida's Extension. There are two *FastTrac* programs:

- A. *FastTrac New Venture* for those who want, over a nine week period, three hours per week, to understand how to examine the feasibility of a potential new business.
- B. *FastTrac Planning* is for seasoned business owners who want, over an eleven week period, three hours per week, to better understand the essential tools of business management, primarily marketing and financial methods.

Each business receives at least one private consultation about the specifics of their operation *at their place of business*. A directory of graduates with sponsor recognition was developed. These are a special value add that are not offered at all *FastTrac* sites.

FastTrac is a no-nonsense, adult learning oriented, program that includes only the essentials:

- ❖ Tactics for marketing success including market research and competitive analysis
- ❖ Building a management team and using an Advisory Council

- ❖ Critical Aspects of Financial Management
- ❖ Traditional and Alternative sources of funding
- ❖ Legal Aspects of business organization

The end result of *FastTrac New Venture* is a feasibility plan AND the knowledge of how to conduct a feasibility study to analyze other possible ventures in the future. The end result of *FastTrac Planning* is a business plan.

The Collier County Extension Service has offered *FastTrac* for the past six years. More than three hundred individuals have graduated representing more than two hundred small businesses. In the most recent impact survey distributed to fall 1999 and winter 2000 graduates, the 25 respondents, representing 73% of the 34 graduates, indicated that as a result of FastTrac training: they had created 51 new jobs, sustained 72 and increased sales volume by \$1,532,000.

FastTrac, and small business education programs like FastTrac, can have positive impact upon the economic health of small business and, given the number of Americans engaged in small business, our economy as a whole. For more information go to [www.fasttrac.org](http://www.fasttrac.org)

### **Learn to Lead**

The project to which I have given direct professional leadership for the past fourteen years is "Learn to Lead". This eleven-week series of three-hour sessions is designed to encourage emerging leaders to step forward and accept responsibilities. In Learn to Lead theory is immediately put into practice with a small group practicum project. A quote from one of Learn to Lead's graduates says it all.

“Learn to Lead helped me do more things right from the start; learning to involve others, delegate, and work as a team member”.

The curriculum outline includes:

*The Basis of Leadership* – Problem Solving and Making a Change.

*Components of Leadership* – Understanding Yourself as a Leader, Building a Team, and Managing Conflict.

*Leadership Communication Skills* – Listening Skills, Giving / Receiving Critical Feedback, and Public Speaking and Writing.

*The Community and its Leadership Structure* – Community Organization and Structure and Identifying Community Leaders.

*Small Group Project Presentation* – Recognition and Presentation of Certificates.

Collier County served as the pilot county for the initiation of Learn to Lead through Dr. Lionel Beaulieu and as a case study for state training of other Florida agents. The program won the Public Policy Education Award in 1988 and was presented to the Public Affairs Committee at the National Convention of Extension Home Economics Agents. In all Thirteen Learn To Lead classes have graduated with a total of 233 graduates. The program includes developing a practicum project in which participants are expected to work with a recognized community leader as facilitator to “learn by doing” a plan of action in addition to 11 weekly sessions. Program supports requires recruiting participants, special advisory committee, and publicity in media, speakers, and funding support for recognition banquet.

## **IMPACT:**

In all, the thirteen classes have developed and presented to community leaders 47 plans of action. The eight implemented are mandatory garbage collection, middle class rental housing, middle school parents group, amendments to zoning for day care, airport development, home buyers education, sense of community, and rehabilitation in depressed areas.

Of 201 graduated more than a year, 79 returned surveys to report accomplishments. Use of skills to more effectively communicate, organize groups, and set goals were evaluated. The following chart reflects the responses:

### **Used communication skills to:**

Write letters to public officials, make other contacts with public officials, listen to public addresses, speakers, and politicians, speak on behalf of a program, project, cause and deal more effectively with media for a total of 112.

### **Used group skills to:**

Conduct business or other organizational meeting, work with others on projects or programs, involve others who were not previously involved, be an effective committee member, helped resolve a conflict for a total of 136.

### **Used goal setting skills to:**

Set specific goals for self, organization or project, identify or assemble resources to reach goal ,  
attain set goals or evaluate results for a total of 94.

In response to the question, "What other benefits have you received from the leadership program?" graduates identified the following: Increased self-confidence; feeling confident around recognized

community leaders; stronger commitment or sense of community, and familiarity with the structure of government. In addition, graduates felt it was valuable as an opportunity to meet others interested in community involvement, as well as the opportunity to become more informed on issues affecting the community.

In a 1996 retrospective survey graduates were also asked to list and describe community projects in which they have become involved. In all, the 53 respondents listed 108 projects including churches, youth groups, non-profit boards, civic organizations, chambers, and minority organizations. In the last year, they and volunteers they led had contributed 9,634 hours to community activities. They have recruited 2,016 people to become involved in community projects. Comparison to pre-assessment data shows inter-personal group and leadership skills improved from a percentage rating of 26.7% to 85.7%. Involvement in voluntary organizations increased by 55%. Involvement in community projects more than doubled.

Beginning in 1999, Learn to Lead was adapted for emerging leaders amongst county employees. Over three classes, fifty have graduated and produced nine practicum projects covering: transportation, wildfire safety, improving county computers, flash-flooding, serving special needs populations, littering, employee retention, and the county's public image. A public presentation is made to the county manager and department heads of the projects. Implementation of action plans have included wild fire safety, improving computers, serving special needs populations, and littering. County manager requested a special follow-up presentation on the county's public image to his division management team.

In the introduction our rural community was described as existing beside Collier's platinum coast and the gaps that created. Luckily, bridging those gaps by bringing the coastal resources to the region's rural interior has been a priority for the two remaining organizations to be discussed.

The class materials are currently undergoing a revision which will be tested fall 2001 revised and submitted for publication through the University of Florida's publication review process in the spring of 2002. Once completed it would be available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### **Immokalee Foundation**

The Immokalee Foundation organized as a not for profit 501©3 eleven years ago has evolved as an event and private fund raising effort from the coast in Naples directed at serving the children of Immokalee. Uniquely from the very beginning, its founder Parker Collier, organized and relied upon a beneficiary advisory committee made up of Immokalee residents only who evaluates grant applications and follow through on services provided for the \$1 million distributed. Linking the strengths of both communities has forged a do "with" not do "for" ethic.

### **Southwest Alliance of Educational Leaders**

The Southwest Alliance of Educational Leaders is only three years old and is modeled from a Michigan example. The school districts in the five county region, two of which are totally rural, were organized into an alliance with all the regionally accredited universities and colleges in the region. The first focus was on collaborating with the Economic Development Councils to create partnerships

with the business community to designed customized workforce training programs through a series of Workforce Summits.

The first Workforce Summit in 1999, was a facilitated listening session where employers outlined their needs. The second was a response from the education community. The third in fall 2001 is designed as a report card update. This process is very much like extension advisory committee methods. The synergy, avoidance of duplication and eventual grant leveraging for the five county service area is exciting. Unfortunately, the University of Florida / Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension land grant was intentionally not included. The issue in Southwest Florida was visibility. Extension's education mission outside of agriculture was not well understood. For more information go to [www.swfleducation.com](http://www.swfleducation.com).

In summary, there is one last resource that can bring this concept into focus. In the December 1995 edition of the Kettering Foundation's *Connections*, seven pages covers two articles "Building Communities, Developing Economics" and "Tupelo, Mississippi: An Ordinary Place with extraordinary outcomes". The first article lays out the research and concepts while the second outlines a practical example. The relationship between economic development and civic life based on their research shows that a healthy civic life as characterized by active, public-spirited citizenry engaged in cooperative problem solving and action is the means to economic development, the end. "That is, a healthy civic life generally precedes a healthy economy, rather than the reverse".

So, where do you begin? There are never enough hours in the day for all that needs to be done, but in a nutshell – begin supporting citizens building their community and economic development will follow.