Heritage-Based Rural Development
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Forum Journal

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Once prominent “sentinels” of their communities, traditional grain elevators are rapidly disappearing from the landscape.

PHOTO BY JEAN FOLLETT
Protecting Our Rural Heritage

SENATOR BLANCHE LINCOLN

As a seventh-generation Arkansan and a native of Helena, I have always valued the culture and heritage of my state. Eastern Arkansas, in particular, is near and dear to my heart.

I grew up within walking distance of both sets of grandparents and neighbors who were willing to lend a helping hand when times were tough. As a young girl, I didn’t realize how much these experiences would influence the person I have become. Rural America’s strength lies in these types of experiences. They are important fibers in the fabric of who we are. But unfortunately, they are rarely repeated in today’s world, for today’s generation.

I believe it’s critically important that we preserve our history and develop venues where both visitors to Arkansas and natives of our state can learn about past generations and cultures.

The recent work of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and its state and local partners has shown how our rural heritage not only lives in our memories—it is also an asset to build upon for our future. Preserving our rural heritage is a strategy to achieve sustainable development and create jobs in rural areas.

In my role as a United States Senator, I believe it is critical to help provide resources and assistance for rural community development and job creation. In the last Congress, I sponsored a bill to improve the historic rehabilitation tax credit—the nation’s largest federal incentive to promote the sustainable development and creation of rural America’s historic rural and urban buildings and places.

I reintroduced this measure with Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine three months ago because Arkansas has many cities and towns where underutilized historic buildings can have a greater role in spurring neighborhood reinvestment and in addressing the shortage of rural affordable housing.

Through the Community Restoration and Revitalization Act, I want to make sure that our citizens benefit from the tax credit’s job-creation and economic development potential. Many job opportunities can be created through trade and manufacturing related to retrofitting and rehabilitating historic buildings.

The bipartisan Community Restoration and Revitalization Act will promote greater investment in commercial projects,

Built in 1912, the former Missouri Pacific train depot in Helena, Ark., was adaptively used to create an interpretive museum.

PHOTO BY JAMES LINDBERG
particularly for Main Street businesses located in small towns and older neighborhoods where there is a critical need for investment and revitalization. Since it was first enacted in 1976, the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit has generated more than $50 billion in renovation and revitalization, and created thousands of jobs across the country.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I know that strategic federal programs can support and spark private initiatives and partnerships, ranging from innovative food production to renewable energy to sustainable rural development.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s recent pilot projects in rural regions of Arkansas and Kentucky have shown the promise of implementing a “heritage-based” approach to economic and community development in rural regions. These two regions were selected to receive assistance from the National Trust, with funding provided by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Each of these areas uses a regional approach to rural economic development that builds on geographic, historic, economic, and cultural ties. Heritage-based rural development includes strategies such as conserving historic structures and landscapes, heritage tourism, entrepreneurial and small business development, education, and regional branding and marketing.

As an Arkansas native, I am particularly familiar with and proud of the work that is underway in the Arkansas Delta region, in collaboration with the Arkansas Delta Byways regional tourism promotion association and Dr. Ruth Hawkins.
at Arkansas State University. Employing heritage tourism as a key economic development strategy has proven successful at attracting visitors, dollars, and additional related investments in small towns and rural communities across the region—for example, the development of an Arkansas Delta Music Trail, www.deltabyways.com; the Southern Tenant Farmers Museum in Tyronza, http://stfm.astate.edu; and the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center in Piggott, http://hemingway.astate.edu. Through initiatives such as Arkansas DeltaMade, www.arkansasdeltamade.com, this program is also supporting entrepreneurs and growing local businesses in the region.

Similar work is underway in the central Kentucky region, where the National Trust has been working with state and local partners. The work in these regions is demonstrating that you don’t have to sacrifice your heritage and unique flavor to achieve rural economic and community development.

This is an important time for rural communities. Many creative people and organizations are working hard to build stronger, more sustainable rural economies. The federal government can play a role in supporting these efforts, by removing barriers and providing incentives.

I am pleased to know that preservation advocates around the country are working hard to preserve our nation’s rural heritage and helping to foster sustainable rural economic development. I look forward to working together with you.

U.S. SENATOR BLANCHE LINCOLN became the first Arkansan to serve as Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry in September of 2009. As Chairman, she provides Arkansans a strong voice in Washington on issues important to rural communities.
Heritage-Based Rural Development

JAMES LINDBERG

A recent New York Times article reported that some 62 million people across the country are currently trying to earn money by running a farm. And the numbers are increasing rapidly, up by more than 18 million in a recent month. What is going on? Is this the biggest “back to the farm” movement we have ever seen? Not exactly. The article is reporting on the number of people playing “FarmVille,” currently the most popular game on Facebook.¹ Players decide what virtual crops to plant, when to harvest and sell, and how to work with their internet neighbors. (You can tell that FarmVille is a game because every farm makes a profit. In reality, fewer than a million people in the United States claim farming as their principle occupation and more than 80 percent of farm families rely on outside income to make ends meet.)²

As the online popularity of FarmVille suggests, Americans remain interested in rural life. Earlier this year the Pew Research Center conducted a survey that asked respondents to identify what kind of place they would most like to live in: a city, suburb, small town, or rural area. Small towns and rural areas were the top choice of more than 50 percent of the respondents, despite the fact that only about 17 percent of the nation’s population currently lives in a rural area, as defined by the census bureau.³

Building on Rural Assets

But rural communities require more than sentiment to survive and prosper. They need a sustainable economic base and the regular investment of human and financial capital. In many rural regions, these items are in short supply. Across the country, the traditional rural economic sectors—agriculture, forestry, mining, and manufacturing—now employ far fewer people than they did just a decade ago. In response, many rural economic development and community leaders are seeking fresh ideas. This hunger for new rural development strategies presents an opportunity for historic preservation.

This hunger for new rural development strategies presents an opportunity for historic preservation.

Most rural development experts now recommend a diversified approach to economic development, encouraging communities to move away from a reliance on a single economic sector, such as agriculture. In addition, there is an increasing interest in looking at ways to create regional rural development strategies, with an emphasis on the unique characteristics and assets of rural places. These assets might include natural and scenic amenities, recreational opportunities, civic and educational institutions, social networks, food traditions, and culture and heritage.

Of course historic preservationists have been practicing exactly this kind...
In recent years, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has begun thinking about how to bring together all of this experience and apply it comprehensively in specific rural regions. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation was intrigued by this idea as well, and in 2005 it awarded the National Trust a grant to test the idea of “heritage-based rural development.” A national selection process generated proposals from statewide and regional organizations across the country, each describing the different ways that grant funds could help preserve their rural heritage and enhance economic and community development.

Two regions were selected to receive four years of grant support and technical assistance from the National Trust: an economically distressed 15-county corridor along the Mississippi River in Arkansas and an eight-county region in central Kentucky affected by sprawl and major changes in the agricultural life, using classic preservation tools from tax incentives to loan programs and easements.

**HERITAGE-BASED RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Heritage tourism is bringing attention to historic rural communities in every corner of the nation. Preservation groups are rescuing vacant or underused rural assets of all kinds and bringing them back to

What is heritage-based rural development?

Heritage-based rural development helps build sustainable communities and strengthen regional economies through the conservation, use, and promotion of historic and cultural assets. These assets may include buildings, structures, districts, Main Streets, farmsteads, and landscapes, as well as regional arts, crafts, music, food, and events. This approach supports and complements other rural development efforts.

Rural heritage includes distinctive landscapes like the North Common in Chelsea, Vt., which dates to 1795 and is protected as part of a National Register Historic District and a local design review zoning overlay.

PHOTO BY JAMES LINDBERG
Six principles of heritage-based rural development

1. USE A REGIONAL APPROACH. Rural heritage development efforts will have more impact when several communities and counties pool their resources and work together. Regional boundaries should recognize common cultural, geographic, economic, governmental, and historical characteristics. The region should be large enough to encompass a “critical mass” of diverse assets and participants, but not so large that its distinctive character is blurred or interaction among stakeholders becomes impractical. In some areas, existing regional boundaries may be appropriate, while in other cases new boundaries will need to be drawn.

2. PROTECT HISTORIC AUTHENTICITY. Rural heritage development efforts are based on the authentic historic and cultural assets that define the character of a rural region. The character and condition of the historic and cultural assets in each rural region will vary greatly. Some may be well protected and in good condition. Others may be abandoned, in need of repair, or threatened by development. Additional heritage assets may be largely undiscovered. It is essential to protect the tangible connections between heritage assets and the diverse history of the region, recognizing that some aspects of heritage may be particularly fragile, hidden, or complex.

3. NURTURE GRASSROOTS INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP. A broad spectrum of diverse stakeholders should be involved in the development of a shared regional vision and a plan for heritage-based rural development. The leadership for this effort should be drawn from grassroots participants as well as established community organizations and government entities. It is important to provide a range of opportunities for diverse opinions to be voiced and heard, and to create effective communication tools to build and maintain interest.

4. FORGE STRONG PARTNERSHIPS. Regional heritage development requires a range of existing organizations to work together, creating new networks for communication and collaborative effort. These regional initiatives provide an opportunity to collaborate with traditional and non-traditional partners at the local, regional, state, and national level to accomplish mutual goals.

5. BE FLEXIBLE. One of key lessons of the rural pilot projects is that changes and shifts in priorities will likely occur. In fact, adjusting course along the way should be expected. By maintaining a flexible approach, it becomes possible to seize opportunities when they arise. Funding, time, and energy will always be limited, making it necessary to focus on the areas where willing partners and resources are available to move projects forward. Other projects can be put aside for a time if they do not have the support that is needed.

6. MAKE A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT. Complex regional projects like these are time-consuming. Progress will often be slow and incremental. As the Main Street program has shown over the past three decades, tangible and measurable results often take several years to manifest. Achieving success will therefore require a compelling, realistic vision as well as adequate human and financial resources to sustain work over many years.
Six strategies for heritage-based rural development

1. EDUCATE ABOUT THE VALUE OF RURAL HERITAGE. Learn more about the depth and diversity of heritage assets that exist in the region. Inventory known assets and initiate surveys to uncover additional resources. Conduct oral history research and other interviews to gain historical perspective and understanding. Share the results with the public. Provide opportunities to learn about preservation tools and the connections between preservation and sustainable development.

2. CONSERVE HERITAGE ASSETS. Save vacant and/or deteriorating structures by finding creative new uses for them. Conserve historic landscapes by supporting the economic viability of traditional uses. Protect historic sites and districts through designations, planning and zoning tools, and financial incentive programs.

3. ENCOURAGE LOCAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE USE OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES. Create new business opportunities around regional foods, arts, music, and crafts. Provide training, technical assistance, and marketing support to strengthen existing businesses and create new ones. Locate new enterprises in existing historic structures whenever possible. Work with local Main Street programs to help retain and attract businesses in established, historic commercial districts. Seek alternatives to formulaic big-box and chain retail development. Support or initiate “buy local” campaigns.

4. DEVELOP HERITAGE TOURISM POTENTIAL. Find ways to enhance the authentic experiences at existing heritage tourism attractions and create exciting new experiences that will keep visitors in your region longer and give them reasons to plan a return visit. Look for opportunities to link tourism attractions thematically and geographically, through scenic byways and recreational trails. Work with partners to increase awareness of your region’s attractions among residents of nearby metropolitan areas.

5. BRAND AND MARKET YOUR REGIONAL IDENTITY. Develop a regional brand to increase awareness of regional assets and the connections between them. Market your region to increase community pride, support local businesses, and promote your attractions to potential heritage travelers.

6. ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC POLICIES THAT SUPPORT HERITAGE-BASED RURAL DEVELOPMENT. Work with partners to establish and promote statewide incentives, such as tax credits for the rehabilitation of historic structures and funding for farmland and landscape conservation. Implement better planning and zoning to encourage investment in existing communities, discourage sprawl, and remove barriers to downtown rehabilitation. Work to establish or strengthen historic preservation ordinances and design guidelines for historic districts.

economy. These two Kellogg-funded initiatives followed another rural project that was already underway in southern Virginia. With grants from the Harvest Foundation and the Public Welfare Foundation, the National Trust worked intensively in Martinsville, Va., and surrounding Henry County to assist a rural area hard hit by job losses in textile and furniture manufacturing.

LESSTONS FROM THE PILOT REGIONS
Based on the experience to date in these rural regions, interviews with stakeholders, and discussions among project partners, the National Trust has developed an initial set of recommendations for heritage-based rural development. Organized as a set of principles and strategies, these recommendations are intended to provide guidance to other rural regions that may be considering similar heritage-based initiatives.

Each of the principles and strategies (see sidebars) is familiar and well-tested, from education to heritage tourism to branding and marketing. The key insight from the pilot regions is that it is the combined and sustained application of these principles and strategies in a defined geographic area that makes the difference. The principles and strategies amplify and reinforce each other, leveraging far greater benefit than would occur if they were pursued independently. For example:

- A marketing program for small businesses in a rural community may be a good idea. But it will be better if it includes the surrounding region as well, and promotes authentic regional products and services that might interest potential travelers to the region. And it will have even more positive impact if the marketing focuses on businesses that are located in historic buildings along traditional Main Streets.

- Similarly, a farmers’ market can support area agricultural producers by providing them with a direct link to consumers. The same market can help local Main Street
businesses as well if it is located downtown. And if some of those Main Street businesses are restaurants and food vendors, they can in turn support the farmers by featuring locally grown products.

An interpretive museum celebrating area music heritage creates a new draw for visitors and helps tell an important story. If it is located in a rehabilitated, formerly vacant historic structure on Main Street it will provide a boost for downtown as well, supporting local businesses and restaurants and spurring similar rehabilitations of nearby structures.

As these examples indicate, heritage-based rural development is grounded on the commonsense notion that conserving and using existing assets—our shared heritage—is a smart way to support sustainable rural development. Each of the articles in this Forum Journal provides a perspective on current practices and trends related to the strategies of heritage-based rural development. The authors remind us that there is much effective and creative work going on around the country that is helping to conserve our rural heritage and strengthen rural economies. May it continue! FJ

JAMES LINDBERG is the director of preservation initiatives in the Mountains/Plains Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He can be reached at james_lindberg@nthp.org.

2 U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics.
Rural Preservation Strategies: Save a Place, Save a Story

JEAN A. FOLLETT

It’s easy to account for the love affair that many Americans have with the countryside. Whether it’s their grandparents’ farm, a solitary barn they drive by on the way to their favorite vacation spot, a grain elevator seen on the horizon at sunset, cattle grazing on the open pastures of the West, a fruit orchard in bloom, or an approaching storm seen across the rustling tops of a corn field, many of us have a special place in our heart for what we think of as rural. But it is this very complexity of what we call “rural,” as well as the distances between sites and the dwindling population in rural areas, that make preservation of the buildings and the memories they hold so exceptionally difficult.

In many ways, saving rural properties presents all the classic preservation challenges: Few have been surveyed, there are not enough resources for identifying and classifying them, their original economic use may have been greatly reduced or lost, skilled craftsmen to repair them are in short supply, and they are often unappreciated by those who favor new construction that incorporates more advanced technology.

And yet, when you talk to people about barns, one-room schoolhouses, farmsteads, silos, grain elevators, and other features of our rural American landscape, their eyes light up and they begin to tell you stories. And so when you save a rural historic site, you are saving stories along with the buildings and the landscape they sit in. This is especially true of barns—it seems everyone has a barn story—but characteristic of other rural historic sites as well.

Another classic preservation feature of rural sites is that it often takes teamwork and creativity to save them. Many farm families do make an effort to preserve their cherished older buildings for continued use. Or private owners may acquire and adapt them for economically viable new uses, such as for small-scale organic farming, conversion into a house or store, or use as a special-events venue. But often it’s partnerships that make these preservation projects happen. These partnerships may be between a local group and the statewide preservation organization, a land trust and a rural preservation program, a public agency and a private nonprofit, or some other combination. From the beginning, rural preservation has had the greatest success in states with strong partnerships.

It should be noted, too, that rural preservation is not always happening in areas that are obviously rural. Some of the most active preservation programs for both rural historic structures and rural landscapes can be found in suburbia. The sheer
traffic volume in suburbia and exurbia guarantees that the loss of a particularly iconic farmhouse or barn will be immediately noticed.

Rural preservation is sustained by a wide variety of people, organizations, and strategies, and it is in varying stages of development with many different levels of success across the country. To look at the spectrum of rural preservation strategies is to understand the depth, breadth, and complexity of historic preservation in America today.

NATIONAL STRATEGIES
In most areas of the country, rural populations began to decline during the 1930s, accelerating rapidly after 1945. By the 1980s it was clear that both farming and its rural surroundings were irrevocably altered, and efforts were begun to document and preserve rural heritage sites. Main Street programs directed at small towns, the creation of “living farm” historic sites, and programs to preserve rural churches were all part of the early rural preservation movement.

Barns, because they are so iconic, were an important focus of these early efforts as well. Following World War II, farming technology made huge leaps forward, with farm sizes, equipment sizes, and specialization all increasing exponentially with each passing year. All across the country there were barns that had been neglected since the beginning of the farm depression in the early 1920s. Many barns were simply out of work. Taxes and insurance costs to maintain the buildings could not be justified. Barns were left to rot, were burned down to save on costs, or were sold to lumber recyclers. Suburban sprawl encroaching on former farmland also began to dramatically reduce the supply of historic barns. Even counties where farming was still a major economic activity were affected: Townships in McLean County, Ill., lost 50-75 percent of their barns in the three decades following the war. Across the country there was a sense that historic barns were doomed.

In response to these concerns, in 1987 the National Trust and Successful Farming magazine partnered to create the BARN
AGAIN! Program, designed to use demonstration projects to show the adaptability of older barns for modern farm uses. The doors on older barns were enlarged for new equipment, barns were converted for new uses such as raising young hogs, and farmers began to seek advice on how to maintain and utilize their barns. Educational efforts, including annual awards and several publications, have been a strong component of the program. A BARN AGAIN! exhibit that traveled around the country in the mid-1990s proved to be a major inspiration, sparking the creation of several of the earliest and strongest statewide barn preservation programs. Still supported by Successful Farming, BARN AGAIN! continues to operate out of the Trust’s Mountains/Plains office in Denver. A new initiative of the program, and topic of a recent publication, promotes the use of older farm buildings for sustainable agriculture.

The National Register also played an early role in showcasing historic farms and other rural buildings. One of the very first listings was the home and shop of John Deere in Illinois. Ranches, plantations, and farms were all listed within a very short time of the National Register’s inception. The National Park Service published its first bulletin dealing with rural historic properties in 1989. Although this was a good start, training opportunities and published resources that would help preservationists and others evaluate historic farm buildings were sorely lacking for many years, with beautiful coffee table books about barns dominating the literature. Only recently have researchers had access to regionally relevant and more technical guide books. With these—and in response to the obvious endangerment of many rural historic buildings (including those in the path of proposed highways, calling for Section 106 review)—the last decade has seen a concerted effort by states, counties, and local groups to undertake detailed rural surveys.

Since 2005 the National Barn Alliance (NBA) has tried to take the lead on rural surveys. Originally a loose coalition of Midwestern statewide barn programs and the BARN AGAIN! Program, the NBA has grown in recent years to include statewide programs throughout the country. It promotes barn rehabilitation and conversions and has worked to create a standard survey form that can be used by both volunteers and professionals. Its website (www.barnalliance.org) serves as a clearinghouse for barn preservation news and resources. The NBA has also stayed true to its original role and continues to be a networking spot for state barn preservation groups.

PHOTO BY JEAN FOLLETT

With larger replacement doors, this barn in Washington Township, LaPorte County, Ind., can now accommodate modern farm equipment.
STATEWIDE STRATEGIES
The oldest statewide programs with a focus on rural preservation have been around for 20 years and, not surprisingly, were initiated in states where agriculture continues to be a major economic force: Michigan, Ohio, and Vermont. The Midwestern programs, including Wisconsin, receive the support of the Extension Service based at the state land grant university. In Vermont the rural preservation program is run by the state Division of Historic Preservation. Surveys, workshops on barn rehabilitation and conversion, sharing of success stories, and ongoing technical assistance are all features of these long-running programs. An annual statewide conference is often supplemented by county-based workshops. Dedicated staff and existing organizational infrastructure help to explain some of the success of these programs.

Successful statewide programs tend to breed partner organizations. In some states the public organization inspires private efforts. In other states it is a private effort that has been the inspiration for the public sector. Friends of Ohio Barns partners with the University of Ohio and the SHPO. In Vermont the Division of Historic Preservation’s successful survey and grant program has spawned Save Vermont Barns and a complementary assessment grant program at the Preservation Trust of Vermont. Iowa’s private Iowa Barn Foundation has inspired numerous efforts to document and protect that state’s dwindling supply of historic farm buildings. All of these organizations share an interest in identification, recognition, education, and technical support to varying degrees. In some states, such as Connecticut, Vermont, and Washington, small grants for barn rehabilitation are available. The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance offers barn assessment grants which provide funding for a barn restoration professional to assess privately-owned barns.

A number of rural preservation programs focus on educational efforts, such as organizing small-scale barn raisings as demonstration projects, leading classroom...
activities, and engaging Future Farmers of America, 4-H, and other youth groups in special projects. In Iowa a young 4-H–er won a blue ribbon at the state fair for the video she made documenting the barns in her township.

The need to identify and document rural structures as part of the Section 106 review process has proven to be helpful as well. In Minnesota, the Department of Transportation undertook a two-year study of rural historic structures that resulted in a four-volume publication to help guide future planning decisions.4

Many states have a Centennial Farm program that identifies and recognizes continuous family ownership. These programs can be surprisingly large, with many farm families eager to be honored.

In Illinois more than 8,000 farms are in the Centennial Farm program, and farm families anxiously await their turn to be photographed receiving their certificate at the state fair each year. These programs are often run by the state Department of Agriculture and may or may not have a connection to a state agency with an interest in historic preservation.

Connecticut’s barn survey, being done under the auspices of the Connecticut Preservation Trust, and Washington’s Heritage Barn Register, run by the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, are both recent additions to statewide efforts that have seen great success while keeping the focus on documentation and preservation rather than simple recognition.

**COUNTY STRATEGIES**

In states without strong or active statewide organizations that address rural preservation, county groups often pick up and carry the ball. Examples of local survey efforts, barn tours, adult and youth education programs, oral history research, and award programs can be found across the country. In Illinois, where a strong statewide program for rural preservation has yet to emerge, numerous counties have barn tours or agricultural tourism sites and events. For example, Greene County, Ill., has been running a barn tour program for nearly two decades; it’s now a day-long event filled with self-guided tours and related activities in three communities within the county.

County programs often promote rural preservation as an economic development strategy. Barn surveys and tours, ease-
ments, and small town economic development have all been important components of the successful Rural Heritage Development Initiative in Kentucky.5

On the public policy side, counties in some states have adopted historic preservation ordinances. These laws give counties the authority to conduct surveys, landmark individual buildings and rural historic districts, and work to protect rural landscapes and viewsheds as well. Interestingly, the majority of counties with such preservation ordinances are on the urban fringe where farmland and rural character are threatened by approaching or encroaching sprawl. Nearly all of the suburban counties around Chicago, America’s third largest city, have active rural preservation programs that employ surveys, easements, and other protection strategies. Seattle, Wash.’s county, King, also has an active program.

BUILDING-TYPE STRATEGIES
Historically, different ethnic groups have built different types of barns, and these distinctive forms were spread across the country following migration patterns. In upstate New York and parts of Pennsylvania, the Dutch barn—with its distinctive framing, materials, and decoration—is the special concern of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society.

Barn forms also relate strongly to the kinds of crops and livestock that were being raised. Hence there are a large number of dairy barns in Vermont, barns with large hay mows in the Great Plains, and cattle sheds on the ranches of the West.

In several states, tobacco was a major cash crop for more than 200 years. The barns that were used to dry the tobacco are both numerous and distinctive, and differ from one region to the next. In Maryland a tobacco buyout program in 2000 immediately threatened all of the surviving tobacco barns in the southern part of the state, leading the National Trust for Historic Preservation to include Tobacco Barns of Southern Maryland on its 2004 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Since then a special effort has been made to protect these important resources.

Tobacco barns can be saved and enjoyed if new uses are found for them. Pleasant Hill Shaker Village in Kentucky provides two examples of successful reuse.

PHOTO BY JEAN FOLLETT

With the demand for tobacco products falling, traditional tobacco barns, such as this one in Kentucky, need new uses to survive.
One large tobacco barn there has been hosting chamber music events for the past two summers, its ventilated walls letting cool breezes in while protecting the audience and the musicians from the weather. Another historic barn conceals a state-of-the-art collection storage and conservation building.

AG-TOURISM TO THE RESCUE
If you’ve been on a winery tour, visited a pumpkin patch, picked apples, taken a hay ride, been to a dude ranch, or slept at a rural bed and breakfast, then you have probably been bitten by the ag-tourism bug. Although there have been farms open to visitors since the middle of the 19th century, ag-tourism as a focus of local economic development is a more recent phenomenon. In nearly every state one can find excellent examples of what smart, creative people are willing to do to either keep their farm operation in the family or simply to share it with others.

In Franklin, Tenn., Gentry Farm hosts 8,000 kindergarteners each fall, older students in the spring, and families on weekends in September and October. The program there is carefully tailored to meet curriculum goals at the local schools in order to keep the farm on the list of eligible field trips. Income from spring and fall visitors enables the fourth and fifth generation family members to keep the farm operating and in the family.

In Knoxville, Ill., Janis King took on the restoration of a highly visible farm, including multiple barns and a large farmhouse, to open a special-events business. Her vision, creativity, and organizational skills keep a steady stream of couples coming to the farm for their wedding day.
As the number of ag-tourism success stories increases, it will be important for state and local convention and visitor bureaus to coordinate promotion of these engaging sites and the experiences they offer.

**SHOW ME THE MONEY**

“Everyone who calls me wants money to help fix up their barn.” This is the lament of everyone who works or volunteers for an organization involved with rural preservation. But few have grants available for private owners, and this seems unlikely to change. Some states, such as Vermont, give property tax breaks to owners of farmland or historic farm buildings. Occasionally a farm owner takes advantage of the 10 percent rehabilitation tax credit that is available to owners of income-producing buildings constructed before 1936. But if the rural buildings are not productive components of a working farm, then to replace a roof, rebuild a rotted window sill, or put a protective coat of paint on the siding are exercises in faith and nostalgia on the part of anxious farm owners.

Often the best-kept farms are those whose owners run them as a hobby rather than for their livelihood. For them, cash flow is less of an issue—someone else owns the equipment that plants and harvests their crops—and they take great pride in the “picturesque” appearance of the farmstead.

In recent years, sustainable agriculture and organic farming have both proven to be profitable ways to make use of smaller-scale historic farms. As the demand for their products continues to grow across the country, these two uses will increase in importance for preserving our rural heritage.
A NATURAL PARTNER—LAND CONSERVATION GROUPS
Without land, there would be no farms, so the linkage between land conservation and farm preservation seems like a natural one. The Trustees of Reservations in Massachusetts has been preserving cultural landscapes in their entirety—land, buildings, views—for decades. Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation accepts easements on farms that include both land and buildings. But only recently has a concerted effort been made on the part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Land Trust Alliance to extend this option to property owners across the country. Building the capacity for organizations to accept and manage easements will be challenging in the years ahead, since the states with the highest agricultural use have few land trusts or preservation organizations that property owners can turn to for help. The conversation on how to meet this need must continue as the National Trust expands its support for preservation field representatives at the state level.

BETTER PRESERVATION TOOLS
Thanks to the efforts of an enormous array of “barn huggers,” dedicated farm owners, statewide preservation organizations, governmental agencies, and specialized organizations such as the Timber Framers Guild, the available tools for rural preservation are improving with each passing year. We must continue to identify and document these architecturally and culturally significant resources of our past; figure out ways to keep these beautiful, evocative, and often humble buildings useful; train more craftsmen to do the work of rehabilitation; and build alliances to get the job done—no matter how distant the site may be from our traditional urban preservation strongholds. To preserve a farm is to preserve a vital piece of our national story. FJ

JEAN A. FOLLETT, Ph.D., is a historic preservation consultant based in Hinsdale, Ill. She is president of the Illinois Barn Alliance and former board member of the National Barn Alliance. She has been working in the field of historic preservation for more than 30 years and currently serves as a National Trust Advisor for Illinois.

1 www.preservationnation.org/issues/rural-heritage/barn-again
3 See www.barnalliance.org, the website of the National Barn Alliance, for an extensive barn bibliography.
5 A National Trust program funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative also focuses on using rural character to support economic development. For more information on both programs, see, in this issue of Forum Journal, “Telling the Untold Story: Branding in Rural Communities” and “Arkansas Delta Byways: Connecting the Dots.”
Telling the Untold Story: Branding in Rural Communities

RANDY WILSON AND BEN MULDROW

More people are living in urban areas today than ever before. However, significant portions of our population still reside in rural areas. As preservation advocates, we understand these rural areas are priceless resources worth saving and promoting. Community marketing and branding is one approach to preserving our communities and stimulating economic growth.

But what about the citizens who live and work in these rural areas? Why should they care to market and brand their communities? The simple answer is, if we don’t brand our rural areas, everyone else will.

Every single day, citizens, visitors, workers, and tourists brand communities, whether rural or urban, based on their experience and interaction with the community and its assets. If the community does not brand and market itself, others will do it for them…and, perhaps, without the best intentions.

When considering community branding, what is the best approach? Is the approach to branding and marketing rural communities the same as that used in urban areas? If not, what are the differences? Do we brand and market the same kinds of cultural assets or take a new direction? Finally, what are the general principles that might apply when forming a branding and marketing plan for a rural area?

Community and Product Branding

Before answering these questions, it is probably wise to consider the more fundamental questions: What does community branding mean? How does community branding differ from the branding of products and services?

One helpful way to understand the concept of community branding is to first understand traditional branding. Consider the successful brands of Starbucks, Nike, and Apple. Scott Bedbury, creator of the Starbucks brand, defines a brand as a collection of perceptions in the consumer’s mind.

What immediately comes to mind when you hear the word Starbucks? The aroma of coffee? A comfortable atmosphere? A round green logo with a mermaid? A friendly barista? Or perhaps something entirely different, like, “You want me to pay $4.50 for a cup of coffee?!” The point is, a brand name summons all of your past experiences with the product or service, forming an instant opinion.

Branding and marketing address both the promises made and experiences created by using products and services. Starbucks promises to provide a “third place” of social interaction apart from the two most common places, work and home. Nike promises to provide athletes with the equipment, accessories, and clothes necessary to reach their athletic goals. And Apple promises to deliver a seamless, user-friendly experience with technology.
by reducing complicated devices to their simplest forms.

A promise is hollow, however, unless it produces a positive experience. While there are certainly exceptions, most customer satisfaction surveys would reveal that these three companies have done an excellent job of delivering on their promises and have garnered very faithful followings. The real magic of a brand is the reaction of individuals when they see the green mermaid of Starbucks, the swoosh symbol of Nike, or the silhouetted fruit of Apple. These logos achieve the status of universally recognized icons and evoke feelings in people about the experiences each company promises.

Although no mermaid will greet you at Starbucks, no swoosh sign can be purchased at a Nike store, and fresh fruit is not for sale at an Apple store, these icons have become an identity or “brand” that represents many positive experiences made possible by using the products and services of these companies. As such, these brands have become the dynamic expressions, or essence, of each company.

IF THE COMMUNITY does not brand and market itself, others will do it for them...and, perhaps, without the best intentions.

COMMUNITY BRANDING: URBAN VS. RURAL
This same approach applies to branding communities, whether urban or rural. An opinion is formed based on your experience with the places, people, and cultural offerings of a community. The goal of a branding and marketing campaign is to re-tell these positive experiences in a compelling way to a broader audience, while diminishing the negative experiences (without being dishonest). Ideally, the negatives will eventually be turned into positives.

Our communities must be branded in such a way that the people, places, and events become dynamic and evoke positive feelings about the potential experiences to be had there. We must be aware of the tendency to reduce all potential experiences into a single identity that features only one aspect of the community. While there is nothing wrong with featuring a single icon, a good branding and marketing system must encompass multiple interpretations of the ever-expanding options for positive experiences within a community.

Consider the potential pitfalls if Starbucks changed its logo to a coffee cup, Nike switched its swoosh to a shoe, or Apple replaced its logo with an iPhone. While these new logos are actual examples of company products, each fails to capture, or represent, the full range of the products and services (read: promises and experiences) they provide. Yet how often have we seen a community represent its entire essence with a single physical icon? This single-asset approach to branding is not wrong, it is merely incomplete.

By way of example, the Bennettsville, S.C., logo featured on page 22 is quite attractive, yet by virtue of a singular focus on the cupola of its courthouse one might interpret that to be the only attraction in this city. In actuality, Bennettsville boasts a great number of rural tourism assets beyond its handsome courthouse.

Perhaps a better example is the redesign of the Lake City, S.C., seal and marketing logo. The former iteration of the city seal had a literal representation
of three elements: rural industry, tobacco, and its coastal location represented by the palmetto tree. Again, these elements are not incorrect—and can be handsomely depicted as shown in the redesigned seal—however, it is merely incomplete as Lake City boasts far more than these three elements alone can communicate. Contrast its seal with the marketing logo that features a five-pointed star composed of five rotations of “LC” (for “Lake City”) and five colors that represent its holistic approach to community revitalization. This logo approach is open for interpretation in the community’s current, as well as future, revitalized state.

Therefore, our rural communities must be branded to represent a full range of cultural offerings and positive experiences. However, there are distinct differences between branding commercial goods and services and branding our communities. We must understand our rural communities as assets, resources, destinations, and cultural offerings rather than merely as a list of products or services. Each rural community is different, and the list of assets will change, and, one hopes, expand, based on its unique offerings.

So, how is this done in a practical way? Based on our experience with hundreds of communities, most of which are primarily rural, we have discovered the following guiding principles:

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Understand Community.** There is no substitute for thoroughly understanding a place prior to branding. A simple tour or single interview will not suffice. Countless hours must be spent researching, touring the area, and visiting the obvious sites as well as places off the beaten path. One must speak with numerous individuals (in groups and one-on-one), dine in local restaurants, listen to local music, smell the smells, walk the streets, and essentially immerse oneself in the local culture. Only then can one truly understand a community and its essence.

**Redefine Cultural Assets.** When considering rural areas, we must dismiss our usual list of what we consider “assets.” What works in an urban area might not work in a rural area. Frankly, sometimes one must look a bit harder for the compelling and unique story in a rural community. With hard work and an open mind, one will almost always uncover the
intriguing “unknowns”—the beautiful edifice, the remarkable history, the fascinating rumor, the mesmerizing meal, the comical character, the clever craft, the famous son or daughter, etc. Individually these “assets” might not rival a major attraction in an urban area, but taken as a whole, they weave an authentic, cultural tapestry that tells a real story.

**Determine Points of Emphasis.** Key to branding a rural community is to establish whether to emphasize a town or region’s “hard” or “soft” assets, or both. “Hard” assets are the physical characteristics, sites, and destinations in a community. “Soft” assets are the people, culture, and practices in a community. There is no right or wrong approach; however, the decision must be made from a thorough understanding of both kinds of assets in the community.

The following examples illustrate branding based on different points of emphasis.

**EMPHASIZE CHARACTER: THE ARKANSAS DELTA**

The Arkansas Delta boasts many places of significance, but we believe its most compelling aspect is the character of its people. The culture of the Arkansas Delta features what we termed a “culture of agriculture.” Namely, it is a culture wholly dependent upon the land. This agricultural lifestyle produces an attitude of resolute resiliency, forged from both good and hard times. The blues music genre, which originated from the people of the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta, best expresses this attitude of resiliency.

The cultural identity of the Delta focuses on a lifestyle united by food, family, and faith. Across 15 counties, there is a regional pride felt among the people of the Arkansas Delta, or “Deltoids,” as they refer to themselves. This sense of identity is rare in our cultural mixing bowl and made for the most compelling branding approach. The branding campaign developed from the theme “Arkansas Delta: Soil & Soul,” a direct reference to the very nature of its people, place, and “culture of agriculture.”

For more information see “Arkansas Delta Byways: Connecting the Dots” in this issue and also www.deltabyways.com. Note: The Arkansas Delta project was a National Trust for Historic Preservation Rural Heritage Development Initiative.

The branding for the Arkansas Delta region honors the area’s agricultural roots and its food, music, and family traditions.
EMPHASIZE PLACE: 
ATCHAFALAYA, LA.
The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area is a 14-parish region of Louisiana along the Atchafalaya River Basin. In the 1950s, a massive dam and levee system was built to control the Atchafalaya River and to preserve the future flow of water down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. The levees run the entire length of the National Heritage Area and, in most places, limit access to the river.

When studying the area, it was obvious that this region (like the Arkansas Delta) was defined by its connection to the river. Although the parishes lined the river basin, the levees made it nearly impossible to actually connect with the river. Our challenge was to connect the region to the river through a marketing and branding campaign.

The separation of the river and the region spurred a study of the cultural experience that made this region distinctive. What was discovered was a place that was home to the Acadian people and the development of the Cajun culture with foods and a language all their own. From this discovery, we created the brand tagline “Atchafalaya: America’s Foreign Country.”

For more information see www.atchafalaya.org. Note: The Atchafalaya project was a project of the Louisiana Atchafalaya National Heritage Area.

EMPHASIZE EXPERIENCE: 
CENTRAL KENTUCKY
The Central Kentucky Rural Heritage Development Initiative is a collection of eight counties in central Kentucky between Louisville and Lexington. When branding the identity of the region, the stakeholders asked, “Why are these eight counties unique?” The answer is, “Because of the cultural diversity of the eight counties, the Kentucky Crossroads: Where Everything Comes Together” sums up the diverse range of cultural experiences to be had by traveling the rural roads of eight counties in Central Kentucky.
counties grouped together?” The answer became very clear after seeing the diverse range of cultural experiences from the east to the west, whether traveling the Bourbon Heritage Trail, visiting a traditional Shaker Village, touring Lincoln’s birthplace, or watching a performance of “My Old Kentucky Home.”

A visitor to these Kentucky “crossroads” can absorb the quintessential Kentucky story without ever stepping foot in the big cities to either side. This region was the perfect cross section of Kentucky and boasted many cultural assets worth preserving in their rural environs.

Understanding and embracing the rural roads was the avenue to creating a brand identity that spoke of the unique cultural experience: “Kentucky Crossroads: Where Everything Comes Together.”

For more information see www.kycrossroadsregion.com. Note: The Kentucky Crossroads project was a National Trust for Historic Preservation Rural Heritage Development Initiative.

**EMPHASIZE ORDER:**

**COVINGTON COUNTY, MISS.**

A countywide branding program in rural Mississippi revealed three predominant communities that had minimal cooperative spirit. This disunity was fueled by everything from high school football rivalries to local political and economic competition. We needed a branding campaign to rally and unify the communities as well as foster a spirit of cooperation.

The first step was to search for unifying elements that existed among the communities. Internally, there seemed to be none. However, externally, three organizing elements tied the three communities together: a major roadway, a meandering river, and a historic railway. One of the communities was known for recreational opportunities on the river, another boasted a beautiful train depot and plaza, and the third was known for its boulevard (Old Highway 45) along the major roadway. Therefore, the unifying brand tagline created for the county was “Rails, Rivers, Roads…Reconnect.”

After identifying the external elements that united the communities, the next step was to foster a renewed spirit of cooperation among the communities. A market analysis revealed there was virtually no cross-commerce among the communities.
So we created and designed a countywide loyalty campaign that emphasized shopping “in” Covington County. Additional recommendations to address this internal disconnect were to foster the cross-marketing of each communities’ assets and the creation of a formalized, countywide tour. In response to the cross-marketing recommendation, a guidebook for reconnecting Covington County was designed. The formalized tour took on a surprising identity: Covington County is host to arguably the best named community in all of America….Hot Coffee. That’s right, Hot Coffee, Miss.! With that kind of whimsical brand equity already built into the name, we simply formalized the tour into the “Hot Coffee Tour.”

**WHY COMMUNITY BRANDING?**
Let’s return to the fundamental question: *Why is branding rural areas important?* We have already established that we must brand our communities or everyone else certainly will. But more importantly, branding helps capture the essence of our communities and communicates that message to a broader audience. The greater purpose in branding our rural communities is to build community pride, stimulate the local economy, and promote a preservation spirit that compels people to be better stewards of their culture and the place they call home. FJ

RANDY WILSON is the president of Community Design Solutions, a consulting practice committed to engaging citizens in the process of designing their communities. He also serves as the architect for the Mississippi and South Carolina Main Street programs.

BEN MULDROW is a partner in Arnett Muldrow Associates based in Greenville, S.C. He is the community branding specialist for Arnett Muldrow and has developed brands in hundreds of communities all over America.

Sometimes serendipity plays a role in branding. A tour of Covington County plays on the appealing name of one of its communities—Hot Coffee, Miss. This eye-catching logo is designed to be used on printed materials as well as merchandise such as t-shirts and mugs.
Energizing Entrepreneurs: The Heart of Rural Heritage Development

DEBORAH M..markley

The importance of entrepreneurs to the economic renewal of both rural and urban places has received increased attention during the past year of global economic turmoil. The Kauffman Foundation put significant effort into demonstrating the economic contributions that entrepreneurs, and the ventures they create, make to overall economic growth. The foundation’s most recent publication answers a question close to the hearts of both families and policy makers throughout the country—where will the jobs come from?

Until 2005, we knew that from 1980-2005, nearly all net job creation in the United States occurred in firms less than five years old. An analysis of the 2007 Census data shows that young firms (defined as one to five years old) still account for roughly two-thirds of job creation, averaging nearly four new jobs per firm per year. Of the overall 12 million new jobs added in 2007, young firms were responsible for the creation of nearly 8 million of those jobs. ...Given this information, it is clear that new and young companies and the entrepreneurs that create them are the engines of job creation and eventual economic recovery.

While these data suggest the power of entrepreneurs to restore strength to the national economy, community and regional leaders have discovered the power of entrepreneurship as a rural development strategy. In individual communities as diverse as Tupelo, Miss.; Ord, Neb.; and Fairfield, Iowa, and regions as unique as Appalachian Ohio, the Minnesota Iron Range, and western North Carolina, leaders are building strategies to energize entrepreneurs—their homegrown talent—as promising alternatives to outward looking approaches focused on attracting the next manufacturing plant, big box retailer, food processor, or prison.

The potential silver lining of the current economic crisis is that the time is ripe for a renewed focus and commitment to energizing entrepreneurs as a core approach to rural economic development.

This article shares insight gleaned from rural communities and regions that are designing and investing in entrepreneurship strategies as a primary approach to economic development, beginning with a brief discussion of who entrepreneurs are and the role they play in creating economic activity. The discussion continues by exploring what it takes to create a suc-
cessful entrepreneurship strategy, drawing on specific lessons from the field. The concluding section makes the important connection between heritage development and entrepreneurship.

THE ROLE FOR ENTREPRENEURS IN REVITALIZING RURAL AMERICA

Simply defined, an entrepreneur is one who creates and grows a venture. Entrepreneurs see the opportunities that are embodied in rural assets and bring together the resources needed to turn those opportunities into wealth for themselves and their communities. They animate the preservation of Main Streets and historic properties—bringing commerce into restored downtowns, incubating new businesses in historic spaces, and creating economic value out of preserved cultural heritage.

What distinguishes an entrepreneur from a more typical business owner on Main Street is the willingness and capacity to focus on the business rather than being caught up solely in the day-to-day work in the business. Entrepreneurs question their business model, look for new markets and opportunities everywhere they can, and are more likely to ask “what if” and “why not” than they are to remain focused on doing things the way they have been done for years (or even generations). The hardware store owner in western North Carolina who carves out a unique market niche as an online provider of Makita power tools and services is an entrepreneur—moving beyond a more traditional business model to embrace new technology and new markets. The young man who creates a company to bring previously outsourced jobs to rural Missouri, developing new skills in rural workers and tapping new markets, is an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurial talent across rural America is diverse. It includes in-migrants who wish to live in a rural environment to enjoy a better quality of life, and who are transplanting or creating entrepreneurial ventures in their new communities. It includes people, especially young entrepreneurs (up to age 29), who are compelled to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams as a way to remain in or return to the rural places where they grew up.

And, importantly, this pool of talent includes entrepreneurs who are actively growing their businesses. Two studies earlier this decade found that such “growth entrepreneurs” exist in all regions of the country. They represent an economic development asset because they are already rooted in rural communities and regions or have chosen to live there, because they bring new energy and ideas to rural places, and because they create an economic livelihood for themselves and others.

Given that entrepreneurial talent exists in most rural places, the key challenge is creating the community environment or culture that nurtures and supports that talent. Through fieldwork over the past decade, several elements of successful practice have been identified and provide lessons for economic development practitioners who are launching entrepreneurship development initiatives.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Innovative entrepreneurship development initiatives across rural America share at least four common elements:

- They are entrepreneur focused.
- They build leadership capacity.
- They take a collaborative systems approach.
- They focus on regional assets.
Entrepreneur focused
Entrepreneurship development is a human development process—building the skills and capacity of individual entrepreneurs, and potential entrepreneurs, so that they can most effectively realize their dreams of business ownership and success. Being entrepreneur focused means identifying and connecting with rural entrepreneurs—knowing who they are, identifying their needs, and getting feedback from them as the customers of the initiative.

One example of this entrepreneur focus is taking place in northern Minnesota. The Greenstone Group (an initiative of the Northeast Entrepreneur Fund) is focused on building the capacity of entrepreneurs through individual coaching and peer networking. The program has helped individuals launch or advance such business ventures as a custom sign business that has increased sales, expanded its product line, hired two new staff, and given bonuses and raises in 2009. Another entrepreneur, an experienced sculptor, expanded a business line producing cremation urns, which are sold online, for people and pets.

Entrepreneurs work one-on-one with a coach to identify key challenges and the resources needed to help address those challenges. As importantly, the coaching relationship helps the entrepreneur to take a longer term and more global view of the business. Peer support and networking enhance this experience, giving entrepreneurs an opportunity to learn from others who have “been there, done that.” This model emphasizes building the skills of entrepreneurs so that they, in turn, can grow their businesses and create economic opportunity in the region.

Building leadership capacity
Rural places that are successful in creating a more supportive environment for entrepreneurs are places with strong and committed leaders—and enough of them to really make a difference. Too often, new ideas spring forth in a rural place, sparked by the creativity and passion of a single person, only to sputter and die when that individual moves on, or burns out. For entrepreneurship development to be effective and sustainable, attention needs to be given to building leadership capacity that can nurture and sustain these efforts.

One model for building this leadership capacity is HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC). HTC is a comprehensive framework for community building that includes a focus on community philanthropy, youth engagement, entrepreneurship, and leadership capacity. The emphasis on building broad-based leadership capacity goes beyond the “usual suspects” to include young people, immigrants, new residents, women, and minorities and is a
foundational piece of the HTC model. In the first HTC community, Valley County, Neb. (2000 population 4,647), the Leadership Quest program was launched with a class of 20 residents, including five high school students. Over four years, the program graduated 87 new leaders. Some of them are now applying this training by running for public office, including one participant who became the first woman to be elected to the county board.

In addition, the professional leadership capacity for economic development in the county expanded with the hiring of the county’s first full-time economic development director and a part-time business development officer in 2000. The cost of this professional capacity is shared between the chamber of commerce and the county economic development board. Both volunteer and paid leadership are having a significant impact on the county, in ways large and small. Since investing in professional staff, the county has held ribbon cuttings and/or groundbreakings for 17 new businesses and retail sales have increased 20 percent between 2000 and 2004. The business development officer launched a business fair in a middle school that resulted in young entrepreneurs creating businesses, marketing and selling products, and netting profits.

A different approach to building leadership capacity for entrepreneurship is the Kentucky Entrepreneurial Coaches Institute (KECI), a program begun in 2003 to build a network of volunteer leaders and coaches in the 41 most tobacco-dependent counties in the state. Over time, the program has graduated more than 80 community leaders, with another 30 in the pipeline. These leaders advocate for entrepreneurship, provide direct coaching services to individual entrepreneurs, and create multicounty initiatives that have, for example, brought entrepreneurship education to youth, recognized innovative “agripreneurs,” created county E Resource Centers, and launched an agri-tourism initiative.

**Taking a collaborative systems approach**

Across the American landscape, even in rural places, there exists a diverse set of organizations that support entrepreneurs—small-business development centers, microenterprise organizations, chambers of commerce, Main Street groups, community colleges, regional economic development organizations, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), and an array of institutions unique to a state or region. The challenge is that these organizations often work in isolation and do not provide a clear pathway for entrepreneurs to access their services. In addition, entrepreneurship and business development activities are not connected to preservation, tourism, and workforce development efforts, creating obstacles to building collaborative approaches to community and regional economic development.

Examples of collaborative systems approaches do exist. The Entrepreneurship Development Systems for Rural America effort, supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, resulted in the creation of collaborative systems in six regions of the country. While the results are as diverse as the regions served, each initiative demonstrated the value, and challenges, of building a collaborative model.

For example, in North Carolina, the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Alliance consists of representatives from entrepreneurship development organizations, universities, community colleges, coopera-
tive extensions, and others, who have been meeting at least bimonthly for more than five years to share program developments and ensure that referrals across these diverse organizations can happen more readily for entrepreneurs. This statewide effort is being replicated in two regions of the state. For example, in northeastern North Carolina, business counselors at the regional university, the community college, and a nonprofit organization are working together to provide training to young, aspiring entrepreneurs through a youth entrepreneurship institute.

Another example of this systems approach is Network Kansas (http://networkkansas.com). This virtual network was established by the legislature in 2004, went operational in 2006, and serves as a central portal to connect entrepreneurs in the state to a network of more than 400 resource partners. The portal offers entrepreneurs an opportunity to connect live with a counselor, either online or by phone, to discuss their needs and be referred to a resource partner. In addition to serving more than 2,000 customers by the end of FY 2008, Network Kansas has advocated for policy change in the state, created new capital programs to meet the needs of entrepreneurs, and funded pilot entrepreneurial community projects across the state. For example, it has provided support to a northwest Kansas county that is helping hunting and tourism businesses develop direct markets to the Rocky Mountain front range, and a county in southeast Kansas that is building agri-tourism associated with its strong Amish, Mennonite, and German Baptist heritage.

WHILE ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT is rooted in individual communities, effective initiatives connect with regional assets.

Focusing on regional assets
While entrepreneurship development is rooted in individual communities, effective initiatives connect with regional assets. Regional initiatives provide access to a wider range of support services, and markets, for the entrepreneurs they serve.
The Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet) provides a range of support services, including technical assistance and access to capital, to entrepreneurs in a multi-county region of southeastern Ohio. Through a kitchen incubator facility, ACEnet provides processing and ancillary support for food sector entrepreneurs including a wine-based pasta and salad dressing company that now sells in more than 1,000 stores across the U.S. and several other countries. Through the Food We Love regional brand, the organization is helping local entrepreneurs tap regional markets. For example, one incubator company is providing prepared vegan, vegetarian, and ethnic entrees to Kroger stores. In addition, ACEnet is a collaborative partner in a range of regional economic development initiatives, including Art of Ohio and the Central Appalachian Network.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT
Over the past decade, there have been repeated calls for taking a new place- and asset-based approach to rural economic development. In 2001 Karl Stauber, president of the Danville (Virginia) Regional Foundation, argued that a one-size-fits-all approach to rural development was ineffective, and identified the following desired outcomes of rural development policy: increased human capital, conservation of the natural environment and culture, increased regional competitive investments, and investments in infrastructure that support new competitive advantages rather than protecting old ones. In 2006 James Lindberg from the National Trust for Historic Preservation wrote that “among rural development professionals, there is a growing consensus that future economic vitality will result from developing local entrepreneurs, not chasing smokestacks and feedlots.” Most recently, in offering a new frame for rural policy and investment, Brian Dabson, president and CEO of the Rural Policy Research Institute, suggests that “there are many windows of opportunity that could transform rural economic prospects” including exploration of alternative energy resources, regional and local food systems, and stewardship of natural resources.

Through a website (www.arkansasdeltamade.com) and other marketing efforts, The Arkansas DeltaMade branding program, one effort of the Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative, brings regional and national attention to local businesses and products.
An underlying theme is the need to draw on regional assets, including natural, heritage, and cultural assets, to uncover innovative and unique sources of competitive advantage. Fortunately, rural development practitioners have been experimenting with and advancing new approaches that focus on tapping the talents of homegrown entrepreneurs and investing to build the supportive regional environments they need to be successful. The examples shared in this article provide just a glimpse of the innovation occurring across rural America.

One of the promising approaches bringing entrepreneurship and heritage development into close alignment is the Regional Flavors initiative supported by the Kellogg Foundation and the related Rural Heritage Development Initiative of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. One of the pilot regions, the Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative (ADRHDI), shows the power of this collaborative approach and demonstrates the elements of effective practice described above.12

Through a partnership between diverse groups including the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Clinton School of Public Service–University of Arkansas, Arkansas Delta Byways, and the Preservation Alliance of Arkansas, ADRHDI built on the region’s rich musical and agricultural heritage to launch the DeltaMade program and brand. This branding created an opportunity to link to existing heritage trails and historic properties. One new effort was the official launch of the Arkansas Delta Music Trail: Sounds from the Soil and Soul. In addition, the initiative focused on the preservation of iconic properties in the region, including a feasibility study for establishing a business incubator in a historic building in one downtown, in partnership with the local community college. Underlying these efforts is a commitment to identifying the entrepreneurial talent that can turn these heritage and cultural assets into economic opportunities for the region, and providing support through a regional market analysis and partnership with Southern Financial Partners, a regional lending and technical support organization.

For the most part, innovations such as ADRHDI occur within an overarching policy environment that responds with incremental change at best. Emerging policy discussions at the national level, however, present openings for renewed conversations about and commitment to place- and asset-based rural development. Significantly, an August 2009 White House memorandum offered policy guidelines for interagency collaboration in support of place-based policies:

Effective place-based policies can influence how rural and metropolitan areas develop, how well they function as places to live, work, operate a business, preserve heritage, and more.13

The convergence of rural development innovations with more supportive public policies suggests the need for deliberate but determined action to spread innovative practices more broadly across the rural landscape. Fortunately, enterprise development strategies have been at the
forefront of rural development innovation and offer lessons for creating more resilient, prosperous rural places in the decades ahead. At the same time, the prominent attention given to the preservation and leveraging of heritage, cultural, and environmental assets suggests an important opportunity for collaboration among heritage preservation and development professionals and enterprise development practitioners in designing creative approaches to rural development. Most importantly, experience suggests that when entrepreneurial talent and heritage assets are combined in a supportive environment, rural people and places reap the rewards of renewed hope and future economic prosperity.

DEBORAH M. MARKLEY, Ph.D., is managing director and director of research for the Rural Policy Research Institute Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. For more information, go to www.energizingentrepreneurs.org.

3 To learn more about the Greenstone Group, go to www.greenstonegroup.org.
4 HTC was developed through a collaborative partnership between the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, the Nebraska Community Foundation, and the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and received primary funding support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. To learn more, go to www.htccommunity.org.
6 KECI is supported through the state’s Agricultural Development Board and the Governor’s Office of Agricultural Policy. To learn more about KECI, go to www.uky.edu/Ag/CLD/KECI.
8 To learn more about ACEnet, go to www.acenetworks.org.
12 To learn more about the Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative, go to www.arkansasdelta.org. To learn more about Regional Flavors, go to www.microenterpriseworks.org/index.asp?bid=2191.
Arkansas Delta Byways: Connecting the Dots

RUTH HAWKINS

Fifty years ago a favorite pastime for many families was a Sunday afternoon drive in the country. It didn’t matter much where you went. Back then, it truly was the journey, rather than the destination, that was important. You could slow down or stop at attractions of interest ranging from fall color to great picnic spots to historic sites and markers.

Part of the fun was watching for the Burma Shave signs that were ubiquitous on the landscape and collectively spelled out humorous messages. Often they provided safety admonitions to motorists, such as “Slow down Pa/Sakes alive/Ma missed signs/Four and five,” or “If daisies/ Are your/ Favorite flower/ Keep pushing up/ Those miles per hour.”

The signs are gone now, but the love of the road is back, as evidenced by the growing popularity of the Federal Highway Administration’s National Scenic Byways program, an effort to get travelers off the interstates and onto the less-traveled scenic and historic routes that reflect our nation’s character. During 2009, five new All-American Roads and 37 new National Scenic Byways were announced in 26 states, bringing the total number of designations in the America’s Byways® collection to 151 routes in 46 states.

Further emphasizing this growing interest, a study by the Travel Industry Association of America in 2004 listed rural sightseeing among the top five activities for U.S. travelers, tied with city/urban sightseeing, and topped only by shopping, attending family/social events, and outdoor activities. Additionally, the American Automobile Association reported in 2009 that 74 percent of its member households took a leisure trip during the previous 12 months, and of those, 82 percent took at least one trip primarily by car.

Our Arkansas Delta Byways region has been working for the past 12 years to capitalize on this growing interest by connecting the dots between related attractions, much as the old Burma Shave signs kept people moving from one sign to the next. By doing so, we are creating the critical mass necessary to draw tourists to historic,
cultural, and natural sites that might not be significant enough to attract travelers from great distances on their own.

ARKANSAS DELTA BYWAYS BACKGROUND

Arkansas Delta Byways refers to an area along the Mississippi River in eastern Arkansas that has been designated by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism as one of the 12 official tourism regions in the state. Much larger than any of the other regions, Arkansas Delta Byways includes 15 counties in the Arkansas Delta, as opposed to the four to eight counties that make up each of the other promotion regions of the state. Additionally, it is a linear region, nearly 350 miles from north to south, presenting significant challenges in promoting it as a cohesive entity.

The Arkansas Delta technically is not a delta at all, but part of a wide alluvial plain created from sediments deposited by the Mississippi River over thousands of years. The drainage basin for the Mississippi River encompasses more than 40 percent of the country’s land mass and includes tributaries from 32 states and two Canadian provinces, making land in the Arkansas Delta some of the most fertile in the country.

While it has some of the richest land, it also has some of the poorest people. A Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission report to Congress in 1990 likened the region to a Third World country, and things have not changed much in the intervening years. The economic distress is due, in part, to the failure of the Delta to diversify beyond its agricultural base. Thus, when mechanized agriculture reduced the need for field hands and tenant farmers, beginning in the 1950s, thousands were out of work with no place to go, unless they could get to factories in the north. Today even small- to mid-sized Delta farming operations have yielded to large-scale farms and multinational corporations, and outmigration has significantly affected education, quality of life, and business opportunities in the region.

A RICH HERITAGE

Although the Mississippi River Delta remains one of the most impoverished regions of the country, it has a distinctive heritage shaped over time by people’s struggles to tame the river and convert the land to productive agricultural use. The geography and natural environment of the region have influenced its history and culture in such a manner that a distinctive bond has been created between the people and the land. There is resilience in the people of the Delta, who seem to recognize that what the river gives, it can also take away.

And, indeed, much has been taken away, and many of the physical reminders of the heritage of the Arkansas Delta are gone. Most of the juke joints (modest roadside spots for eating, drinking, and dancing) have been torn down, even though there are still plenty of reasons to sing the blues. Downtowns that bustled on Saturday nights, when farm families came to town after crops were sold, are now boarded up in numerous areas of the Delta. And many former river towns are either abandoned or, as Mark Twain said of Napoleon, Ark., “swallowed up,
vanished, gone to feed the fishes.” Yet vestiges of this life remain, along with attractions ranging from museums and historic sites to state parks, national monuments, and wildlife areas.

PARTNERSHIP WITH ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
To link all these attractions together, Arkansas State University began working in 1997 with the Arkansas Delta communities and the tourism promotion association for the region (at that time called Eastern Arkansas’ Great River Road Association). The university’s purpose was twofold: (1) to utilize the entire region as an educational laboratory, thus providing enriched experiences for Arkansas State University students, and (2) to serve as an economic catalyst in distressed rural communities by assisting in developing their rural heritage tourism potential.

To begin to accomplish these goals, the university led an effort involving community leaders and more than 600 volunteers to designate a route along Crowley’s Ridge (a unique landform that traverses eight counties in the Arkansas Delta) as a National Scenic Byway. This designation was achieved in 1998, making Crowley’s Ridge Parkway one of the earliest National Scenic Byways in the country.

One of the most important outcomes of the designation was the development of pride within the region. While many residents assumed they had nothing of interest to travelers, the assessment process for byway nomination and the preparation of the required Corridor Management Plan went a long way toward raising awareness and enabling people to see what they had looked past every day.

After successful byway recognition for Crowley’s Ridge, the tourism promotion association changed its name to Arkansas Delta Byways, reflecting its new focus, and began working with the Mississippi River Parkway Commission on a second National Scenic Byway for the region—the Arkansas segment of the Great River Road, designated in 2002. Today these two intersecting National Scenic Byway routes serve as spines, conducting travelers through the region, with a series of spurs and loops off the main routes that enable travelers to venture even further off the beaten path.

HEMINGWAY-PFEIFFER MUSEUM—AN EARLY SUCCESS
Developing the byways has included creating new attractions, as well as linking...
existing attractions. For example, the south end of Crowley’s Ridge is anchored by an outstanding Delta Cultural Center, located in a historic depot, while the Arkansas State University Museum is located midway along the route. But there was little to entice cultural travelers to the northern end of the route. Thus, Arkansas State University acquired the family home of Paul and Mary Pfeiffer of Piggott, Ark., whose daughter Pauline was married to Ernest Hemingway from 1927 to 1940. During their marriage, the Hemingways made frequent trips to Piggott, and Pauline’s family converted the barn into a studio to give Hemingway privacy for writing. It was in this most unlikely setting that he wrote portions of *A Farewell to Arms* and segments of other books and short stories.

In addition to having a famous son-in-law, Paul Pfeiffer was important in his own right to the agricultural heritage of the Northeast Arkansas Delta region. He began acquiring swampland and converting it to agricultural production in 1902, and by 1930 he had amassed 63,000 acres. This land was divided into 40- and 80-acre farmsteads, each with appropriate outbuildings, enabling him to attract some of the best tenant farmers from throughout the country. During the 1930s, he began selling off this land to his tenants, often arranging attractive, flexible payment terms. Thus, many farmers were able to fulfill the American dream of becoming landowners.

Using state grants, private donations, and federal National Scenic Byways funding, the university restored the Pfeiffer home and barn studio to their 1930s appearance (the era when Hemingway was a frequent visitor, as well as the era of significant agricultural development in the region) and opened the property in 1999 as the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center.

The museum serves more than 5,000 visitors annually, and programming includes a house and barn tour that interprets the Pfeiffers’ 1930s lifestyle, literature courses at the graduate and undergraduate level taught by Arkansas State University faculty, workshops for teachers, weekend samplers that give participants an introduction to Hemingway books and short stories, after-school and summer creative writing programs for junior high and high school students, an adult writers’ retreat, school programs developed in conjunction with area teachers to enhance humanities curricula, and a planned Pfeiffer farmstead tour that will take visitors to former tenant sites.

On an economic level, the city of Piggott, with a population of 3,900, added 18 new tourism-related businesses within the first five years of the museum’s opening, including restaurants, gift shops, antique shops, and two bed and breakfasts. Revenues generated by travelers to the area during that time increased by 11 percent. Additionally, the city has developed a downtown master plan, restored its depot as a visitor center, built an amphitheater in its city park, and added another museum in the community.

Based on the success of the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center, two additional historic properties were restored by Arkansas State University. The Southern Tenant Farmers Museum, located in the former headquarters of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, opened in 2006 in Tyronza, Ark., a town situated on a spur off the Arkansas Great River Road National Scenic Byway. The Lakeport Plantation, an antebellum struc-
ture with many of its original decorative finishes, opened in 2007 in Lake Village, Ark. The only surviving Arkansas plantation home on the Mississippi River, Lakeport anchors the southern end of the Arkansas Great River Road.

To manage its off-campus heritage sites and work with other communities in the region, Arkansas State University created Arkansas Heritage SITES (System Initiatives for Technical and Educational Support). This office has an ongoing Memorandum of Agreement with Arkansas Delta Byways to cooperatively promote and develop the tourism potential of the region. Additionally, the university established a Heritage Studies Ph.D. program in 2001, with communities and attractions throughout the Arkansas Delta Byways region serving as laboratories for student projects and research.

RURAL HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Simultaneous with efforts to create and develop the National Scenic Byways, five Main Street communities in the Arkansas Delta began looking at ways to cooperatively establish a regional approach to economic development. With assistance from Main Street Arkansas and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2004, the communities (Blytheville, Osceola, West Memphis, Helena, and Dumas) produced the Arkansas Delta Initiative, an assessment report and action blueprint for revitalizing their communities. A key goal included linking, or connecting the dots, between attractions in their communities.

The five communities all are located directly on the Arkansas segment of the Great River Road. As many of the goals overlapped, Main Street Arkansas, Arkansas Delta Byways, and the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas became partners in a successful proposal for consideration of the Arkansas Delta as one

The new Southern Tenant Farmers Museum in Tyronza, housed in the former headquarters of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, is another Arkansas State University project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
of two pilot regions for a Rural Heritage Development Initiative (RHDI). The RHDI was a three-year demonstration project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with funding support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, to formulate and implement heritage-based economic development strategies. Local matching grants were provided by the five Main Street communities, Main Street Arkansas, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

During the three years of the initiative, from March 2006 through March 2009, the region continued to build on the concept of driving routes and themed heritage trails, with leadership from an RHDI field director. A branding and imaging effort was undertaken, resulting in an “Arkansas Delta: Soil and Soul” brand to reflect the unique spirit of the region. A tear-off map of the region was produced, showing the two byways and the various loops and spurs off the main routes. To encourage people to explore the entire 15-county region, a Delta Destinations passport was created, with plans for periodic gift drawings for those who visit at least 12 of 16 listed attractions.

Further connecting the dots, a crops brochure was produced to help visitors understand what they were seeing in the fields during various seasons, and a birding trail and associated website was developed in conjunction with the Audubon Society. An African-American Heritage Trail brochure has been introduced and a Music Heritage Trail was created that includes a CD/DVD, a map showing locations in relationship to the byways, and a series of markers at significant locations associated with the sounds of the Arkansas Delta—gospel, blues, jazz, country, and rock ‘n’ roll.

The RHDI program also has worked with preservation efforts for a number of historic buildings in the region, providing consulting services, technical expertise, and grant-writing support. These projects have included the former Kress Building and Greyhound Bus Station in Blytheville, the one-room New Hope School in Cross County, African-American churches in Helena and Dumas, the Selma Rosenwald School in Drew County, the Tushek Building in Lake Village, KVSA Radio Station near McGehee, and the Dyess Colony Administration Building from the New Deal era in Mississippi County.

Perhaps most successful of all, an Arkansas DeltaMade program was established to showcase arts and crafts (such as pottery, paintings, jewelry, and quilts) and food products (such as barbecue sauces, jams and jellies, honey, and tamales). The program has grown from 23 vendors at its launch in October 2007 to 69 vendors in March 2009. A Kitchen Incubator project being developed in the Main Street community of West Memphis will continue to address the growing interest in regional flavors.

Though the RHDI project officially ended in March 2009, the work is being continued through the National Scenic Byways program, with a two-year grant to extend the services of the National Trust for Historic Preservation field director. Additionally, the grant provides funding for an extensive marketing plan to guide the region over the next three to five years.

A BRANDING AND IMAGING EFFORT was undertaken, resulting in an “Arkansas Delta: Soil and Soul” brand to reflect the unique spirit of the region.
CONCLUSION

Since designation of the first National Scenic Byway in the region in 1998, $7.47 million in funding for projects along the routes has been received directly from the National Scenic Byway program, along with an additional $9.23 million in federal, state, and private funds to Arkansas State University for preservation and heritage-related projects in the region. Further, the Rural Heritage Development Initiative has brought nearly $2.5 million in directly and indirectly leveraged funds into the Arkansas Delta.

The region has a long way to go, but there have been numerous successful mileposts along the way. We have learned a number of things that will serve us well throughout the remainder of the journey. Among the important outcomes, the Arkansas Delta has benefited significantly from the technical expertise brought to the region by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Arkansas State University. Perhaps even more importantly, the Rural Heritage Development Initiative and the National Scenic Byways designations have provided outside validation that there is, indeed, a heritage worth preserving and celebrating in the Arkansas Delta. FJ

RUTH HAWKINS is director of Arkansas Heritage SITES at Arkansas State University and executive director of Arkansas Delta Byways, a tourism promotion association in eastern Arkansas. She serves as an Arkansas advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

1 Travel Industry Association of America, TravelScope.®
3 The Lower Mississippi Delta Development Commission, Realizing the Dream...Fulfilling the Potential, A Report to the President and the Congress of the United States, May 14, 1990, 6.
4 Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (New York: The Heritage Press, 1944), 206.
5 The first National Scenic Byways and All-American Roads were designated in 1996 by the Federal Highway Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation.
Innovative Programs Benefit Historic Places in the Rural Northeast

ELIZABETH HUMSTONE

From small-town Main Streets and mill buildings along river banks to farmsteads and scenic landscapes, the rural areas of the Northeast are filled with historic resources that residents cherish, that small businesses flourish in, and that visitors from around the world flock to see.

Conservation and continued use of these rural resources pose many challenges for small communities. Volunteer-run local governments and citizen groups are involved in complicated restorations of crumbling historic buildings, legal transactions to protect farmland and scenic vistas, and market assessments for revitalizing Main Streets. In addition, changing economic conditions have contributed to landscapes of abandoned manufacturing facilities, boarded-up stores in village centers, and mile after mile of fallow farmland. Without assistance, it is hard to imagine how these rural areas can respond. Nevertheless, there are signs that communities are turning these conditions around.

Through education and technical assistance in community development, heritage tourism, branding, business development, agricultural promotion, and land conservation, many Northeastern rural towns have stopped the erosion of their quality of life and breathed new energy into their communities. As more models of revitalization of rural economies and conservation of resources emerge, more communities clamor to put their own stamp on rural preservation. There are numerous entities that offer help, including state agencies, federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit consultants. Traditionally much of this help has come from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and its statewide and local partners. There are other new and interesting sources for assistance emerging as well, offered by innovative state programs and regional nonprofits. Some of the most exciting advances can be found in Vermont through its Downtown Program, in rural regions such as midcoast Maine through Friends of Midcoast Maine, and in Massachusetts through its Community Preservation Act.

VERMONT DOWNTOWN PROGRAM

Vermont’s villages and downtowns are a defining part of the state’s rural character. For centuries these centers were where the business of daily life took place, but with the automobile, new highways, and attendant strip development and sprawl many of them began a slow decline. According to Paul Bruhn, executive director of the Preservation Trust of Vermont, “The Vermont brand is the foundation of our economic strength. The brand is based on strong downtowns and village centers, a working landscape, and mountains. It is crucial that we are good stewards of all those resources.”
Since the 1960s, Vermont has taken steps to encourage development in downtowns and village centers through planning and land-use laws designed to prevent incompatible suburban commercial growth. While helpful, it was not enough to come up with good plans. Communities needed more tools to implement the plans.

In 1994 the Vermont Downtown Program, an affiliate of the National Main Street Center, was initiated to offer technical assistance and other incentives for adaptive use of historic buildings and revitalization of Main Streets. In 1998 the Downtown Development Act was passed to create a formal recognition process for communities committed to revitalizing their downtowns, and to offer them tax credits and other benefits. Later that year, concerned by the challenges facing downtowns, the Vermont Forum on Sprawl (now Smart Growth Vermont) and partners, including the Preservation Trust of Vermont, convened Realtors, developers, preservationists, planners, and government officials to discuss how to encourage more development downtown. A group of partners that emerged from this conference succeeded in lobbying to expand the tax credits in downtowns and to add village centers and new town centers to the program. In addition, exemptions from state permitting were given for mixed housing projects below a threshold size. Over the years, advocates have successfully pushed for improvements to the program, including raising the caps on the tax credits, expanding eligibility, and offering simplified ways for property owners to access the monetary benefits.

Today there are 23 downtowns, 94 village centers, and one new town center designated under the program. To be eligible for designation as a downtown, the community must have a National Register Historic District, a revitalization plan, and an organization that coordinates downtown work and demonstrates a long-term strategy. Villages, which are usually confined to a very small area in the historic mixed-use center of town, receive fewer benefits but are eligible for designation even without a historic district or plan.

With designation, benefits flowing to municipalities and property owners include a state historic preservation tax credit of 10 percent, a 25 percent facade improvement tax credit, a 50 percent code improvement tax credit for items such as sprinklers, elevators, and lifts (simpler than elevators) and for brownfields abatement, access to a Downtown Transportation Fund, and priority for certain state funds. The tax credits cannot exceed $1.7 million, a small number but one that has grown over the years. With the assistance of Downtown Program staff, members of downtown organizations receive training in business development, market analysis, promotion, and branding. By exempting certain sized mixed-income housing projects in downtowns from Act 250, Vermont’s land-use law, the state has added an incentive for developers to locate in these areas. Otherwise, under Act 250, developers would have to meet 10 stringent criteria dealing with matters

AS MORE MODELS OF REVITALIZATION of rural economies and conservation of resources emerge, more communities clamor to put their own stamp on rural preservation.
ranging from traffic safety, water quality, and air quality to municipal fiscal impact and compliance with both municipal and regional plans.

With the assistance of the Vermont Downtown Program as well as other state programs, communities in Vermont have been able to address many rural preservation needs. Downtowns that have participated in the program have added a significant number of affordable housing units and business space through the rehabilitation of numerous historic structures that were vacant or underutilized. They have constructed sidewalks, completed streetscape projects, improved parking and pedestrian circulation, upgraded building facades, and restored historic parks. In the smaller villages, the Downtown Program’s tax credits have helped to support facade improvements, lifts to make upper floors accessible, sprinklers to increase use of upper floors, and other alterations to bring buildings up to code.

The town of Hardwick, in the rural Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, provides one impressive example of the Downtown Program’s impact. Residents of Hardwick wanted to rebuild their downtown after a fire in a key building while at the same time promote a food production network on surrounding rural lands. The burned building was rehabbed using Vermont historic preservation tax credits and matching federal tax credits, as well as the Downtown Program’s tax credits for an elevator, sprinkler system, and code compliance measures. The building now houses 14 affordable apartments on the upper floors and, on the ground floor, Claire’s, a restaurant specializing in local produce started

About Claire’s Restaurant

Here in Hardwick, Claire’s restaurant, sort of a clubhouse for farmers, began with investments from its neighbors. It is a Community Supported Restaurant. Fifty investors who put in $1,000 each will have the money repaid through discounted meals at the restaurant over four years.

“The local ingredients, open to the world,” is the motto on restaurant’s floor-to-ceiling windows.

“There’s Charlie who made the bread tonight,” Kristina Michelsen, one of four partners, said in a running commentary one night, identifying farmers and producers at various tables. “That’s Pete from Pete’s Greens. You’re eating his tomatoes.”

NEW YORK TIMES, OCTOBER 7, 2008
www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/dining/08verm.html
PHOTO BY GARY HALL
through the support of community investors and the Preservation Trust of Vermont. With widespread state and federal support for Hardwick’s entrepreneurial food-based industries and downtown revitalization, the community was able to not only rehabilitate a core property in its historic downtown, providing needed housing and a restaurant to showcase local produce, but also support its rural working landscape by providing facilities for storage, processing, and marketing of food.

The Downtown Program is extremely popular and there are more applications for tax credits than there is money. In 2009 some slight gains were made in available tax credits due to an influx of federal economic stimulus funds. Nevertheless, state funds and staffing levels are shrinking in this recession. In spite of broad support, it remains to be seen what 2010 holds for the Downtown Program.

**FRIENDS OF MIDCOAST MAINE**

Rural communities that work to revitalize downtowns know that they must be attentive to what happens outside of their town centers as well. The vitality of small downtowns and village centers is continually under threat from commercial and residential sprawl in outlying areas. This pervasive trend alters rural character, undermines traditional industries, and often decreases the supply of affordable housing in small towns. In 1993 and again in 2004, Vermont was declared one of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation due to the threats to its town centers and quality of life from big box development. Rural preservationists know they must be constantly vigilant to ward off intrusions to their small-town way of life.

One area where citizens have taken action to address rural preservation is in midcoast Maine. When the widening of U.S. Route 1 along the coast was proposed about ten years ago, citizens grew alarmed that the highway would harm the many small towns, the scenic vistas, and the abundant natural resources of the region. They banded together to form Friends of Midcoast Maine (FMM) to educate and advocate for healthy downtowns and the preservation of the rural landscape—places under threat from highway development, sprawl, rising land prices, and loss of jobs.

The organization has stated its concerns this way:

Like pearls on a strand, our midcoast towns are unique and perfectly strung along the coast. From village, town, city, and countryside to all the special places in between, Friends of Midcoast Maine is dedicated to promoting the region’s prosperity while preserving the qualities that make Maine unique.

(from FMM solicitation letter, 2009).

FMM is a small 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a diverse board of directors representing all parts of the region, a full-time executive director, and a part-time staff planner. FMM covers more than 30 municipalities in Maine from Brunswick in the south to Bucksport in the north along the coast and inland. FMM’s modest budget is supported through donations and memberships (35 percent), grants (28 percent), consultation fees (33 percent), and special events (4 percent).

Through FMM, the “grassroots go mainstream,” according to Jane Lafleur, FMM’s executive director. Lafleur, a professional planner, has many years experience working in small towns and knows
that residents in these towns need help to accomplish their goals. FMM works with residents to link their goals and priorities to resources such as state transportation funding and regional planning assistance. FMM has developed ways to engage the public and bring more voices into the planning process in this rural region.

While FMM doesn’t list historic preservation as one of its top priorities, its actions go a long way toward preserving the unique resources of cultural life along the Maine coast. A Maine, Then and Now slide show developed in conjunction with the Penobscot Marine Museum has built awareness of the historic resources that still abound in the region and has garnered support to save what they have for the future. Countless workshops and training sessions have helped communities develop the tools for action, including farmland trusts, big-box store size caps, and connected bike and pedestrian paths.

As one example, the town of Lincolnville, Maine, asked for FMM’s help in deciding what to do with a historic schoolhouse on a property near the town hall and a fire station. Lafleur encouraged the town to look more broadly at the entire village. She facilitated a visioning session that is now leading to the development of a village center plan. A village blog informs citizens of the plan’s progress and invites their participation.

FMM also helps to mediate disputes. Conflict resolution efforts led by skilled professionals can provide valuable answers to rural preservation issues. For example, Camden, Maine, residents were distressed that the state Department of Transportation planned to remove several large trees there while widening Route 1. FMM coordinated a site walk during which concerned citizens and MDOT representatives reviewed each tree; as a result, many of the trees in the historic district were saved.

With a nine-year track record of service to local governments, citizens groups, and grassroots efforts, FMM now stands as a model for how to deliver necessary support services to rural communities in a region with common issues and concerns.

**MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT**

Like Vermont, the state of Massachusetts has taken an incentive approach to encourage communities to protect open space, preserve historic properties, and provide affordable housing. In 2000 the Massachusetts General Assembly passed the Community Preservation Act (CPA) enabling towns to raise funds by an up-to-3 percent surcharge on the local property tax for protection and provision of community assets. In return, the state agreed to match these local funds. The amount of the match has varied. Initially it was 100 percent of the local revenues raised. More recently it averaged 40 percent of the local revenues due to the growing number of communities participating and constraints on state income. More than $330 million in state funds were distributed between 2002 and 2009. During the same period, the number of participating communities grew from 34 to 142, out of a total of 351 municipalities in the state.

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**WHILE FMM DOESN’T LIST HISTORIC PRESERVATION as one of its top priorities, its actions go a long way toward preserving the unique resources of cultural life along the Maine coast.**
To benefit from the state match, cities and towns must annually appropriate at least 10 percent of the fund revenues for acquisitions or initiatives in each of the three priority categories: open space, historic resources, and community housing. Allocations may include funds reserved for projects that are not finalized. The Act promotes public participation by requiring that a local citizens board recommend to the legislative body what the funds should be used for.

A brief survey of expenditures of Community Preservation Act funds by several rural towns in Massachusetts provides a snapshot of the uses of the funds. A clear majority of the funds benefit rural preservation by supporting protection and restoration of historic resources and landscapes, farmland and farm building protection, trail development, historic resource surveys, archival work, rehabilitation of public buildings, and placement of historic markers. For example, the town of Conway used its CPA funds for cemetery restoration, restoration of the Old Boyden School House, and special signage in the historic district. Southwick’s funds matched state and federal funds for farmland preservation and supported a trail network, cultural resources inventory, and rehabilitation of a factory for use as a museum. Dunstable purchased a farm and resold the house and barn with historic preservation restrictions on them; created a picnic area and scenic vista; preserved a historic bridge by providing alternative access for emergency vehicles; and repaired a slate roof on the historic town hall. Although not as frequently listed, affordable housing projects, such as surveys, studies, and organizational development, have also been undertaken in small towns.

The future of the Massachusetts CPA program, however, is not secure. As the number of communities participating in the program grows and as state revenues stagnate due to current economic conditions, communities are no longer getting

With help from Friends of Midcoast Maine, the town of Lincolnville is developing a plan for its village center.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JANE LAFLEUR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FRIENDS OF MIDCOAST MAINE
the 100 percent match. In tight economic times such as today’s, some communities are questioning whether or not they should maintain their participation in the program. In addition, there are concerns that the program benefits the wealthiest communities that can afford the property tax surcharge and, therefore, shifts state funds away from poorer communities.2 Nevertheless, given the substantial resources the CPA program has brought to historic preservation, open space protection, and affordable housing around the state, it has proved to be an effective initiative. In small towns, where financial resources are scarce and volunteers are relied on for valuable services, the CPA program has enabled many rural preservation projects that otherwise would lack funding to proceed.

These three examples illustrate the types of assistance available from state and regional entities that can make a big difference in rural preservation. Communities like Lincolnville, Maine; Hardwick, Vt.; and Dunstable, Mass., were able to make some significant progress on village revitalization, historic preservation, and open land conservation with the help of these programs. Expansion of such programs may be difficult given current economic conditions. There is concern that the cap on tax credits may be lowered due to the stagnant economy in Vermont even in the face of strong demand for funding. Massachusetts is struggling to keep up with its contributions to the CPA program. Regional nonprofits, such as Friends of Midcoast Maine, that rely on active boards and modest budgets and with a clear mission and tools, may provide an enduring solution in some rural areas.

At a visioning session facilitated by Friends of Midcoast Maine’s executive director, residents of Lincolnville, Maine, were asked, “What do you envision for Lincolnville center?” Their answers are ranked by font size in this “wordle” prepared by FMM.

ELIZABETH HUMSTONE is an advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation from Vermont and an urban planner who teaches, writes, and consults on planning and organizational development. She is coauthor with Julie Campoli and Alex MacLean of Above and Beyond: Visualizing Change in Small Towns and Rural Areas, and the recipient of numerous awards including a Rome Prize at the American Academy in Rome.

1 Becket, Boxford, Conway, Deerfield, Dunstable, Hubbardston, Southwick, Templeton, West Boylston. These communities range in population from 1,801 to 9,571 as of 2008.

RESOURCES
Vermont Downtown Program: www.historicvermont.org/programs/downtown.html
www.ptvermont.org/publications/smartmart.htm
www.smartgrowthvermont.org/help/indicators/
www.smartgrowthvermont.org/learn/downtowns/
Hardwick, Vt., case study: www.ptvermont.org/CommunitySupportedEnterprises/CommunityRestaurant.pdf
Friends of Midcoast Maine: www.friendsmidcoast.org
Massachusetts Community Preservation Act: www.communitypreservation.org
www.commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/cpa.asp
ON THE COVER: Vineyard, Adair County, Iowa. Farmers around the country are adopting strategies to help keep historic farmsteads viable in a changing agricultural economy. There are now 400 vineyards and 83 wineries in Iowa, up from just 13 in 1999.

PHOTO BY JAMES LINDBERG.