



## The Vermont Council on Rural Development Fall 2003 Newsletter

When we think about the economic heritage of our state, we may call up images of Yankee thrift and craftsmanship and an ethic of hard work, perseverance, and stewardship. With these enduring values, however, Vermont's economic history has been anything but static; in fact, the state has faced constant change, both cyclical and discontinuous. The diversity of the state's economy today, like its working landscape, is the result of adaptation. Vermont entrepreneurs have a history of ingenuity, of responding to macro-economic shifts with creative new ideas: can do spirit; make do practicality. Will anyone, one hundred years from now, look back without recognizing our time as one of major economic transition? And won't they celebrate this as a time when Vermonters brought their creativity to bear on transitional opportunities—in agriculture, forest products, tourism and marketing, community development, technologies—that gave the state a step up into the new century? VCRD is proud to participate in the dynamic tension around rural community development today, and a confident witness to the creativity of Vermont businesses and communities! Welcome to VCRD's Fall Update, and thanks for your part in supporting the progress of rural Vermont!

### **Vermont Rural Roundtable;**

#### ***“Beyond the Postcard—Envisioning the Future of Rural Vermont”***

VCRD's first Rural Roundtable brought together 250 federal, state, non-profit, and local leaders on August 21st to evaluate eight issue areas and develop action plans. Participants reviewed the VCRD-produced “Rural Needs Assessment,” evaluated challenges identified by rural communities, proposed visions for the future, and enumerated practical action steps. Copies of the "Rural Needs Assessment" can be obtained from VCRD at a cost of \$10.00 each.

VCRD's final report from the Roundtable, “Assessment, Vision, and Action for Vermont Rural Development,” can be viewed at our web site or obtained in paper copy by email request. This report is not a position paper of VCRD, but a summary of the input, ideas, and recommendations of the diverse participants. As the convener and mediator of this process, VCRD was careful to avoid injecting its own interpretations, or censoring opinions or recommendations, but instead attempted to accurately represent the key ideas of Roundtable attendees.

Without minimizing our differences, the Roundtable attempted to document points of unity in our understanding of the challenges facing rural Vermont, our Visions for the future, and the potential for Action today. Co-hosted by USDA Rural Development and the Office of Governor Jim Douglas, the Roundtable was sponsored by Chittenden Bank, Casella Waste Systems, Northfield Savings, Verizon, National Life, CVPS, Smuggler's Notch Resort, and especially, Cabot Creamery and the Vermont Community Foundation.

### **2003 Governor's Rural Summit**

Governor's Summits bring together federal executive leadership in Vermont, key Commissioners and Secretaries of the Governor's administration, and a small group of non-profit executives whose organizations distribute state and federal resources. The 2003 Governor's Rural Summit held at Basin Harbor on September 30<sup>th</sup> and October 1st focused on “Strengthening Rural Communities” by building action plans related to key challenges connected to Youth Engagement, Developing Downtowns, Rural Economic Development, and Planning for New Infrastructure. The Summit process works toward the definition of concrete action steps to respond to key rural challenges—and aims at the commitment of key partners toward their implementation. Participants at the Summit took input on rural challenges and goals from the Rural Roundtable report which were, in their turn, based on input from grassroots “Community Visits” throughout the state. So, in the end, the

Summit presentation of action steps and recommendations to Governor James Douglas completed a consolidated process of consideration, review, and prioritization begun on the streets of rural communities and reaching to Vermont's leading state and federal policy-makers.

## Community Visits

VCRD is working to identify two communities to be offered "Community Visits" in 2004. Please contact us to nominate your community, or with your suggestion of a community that would benefit from the assessment, prioritization and planning support a Visit provides.

Meanwhile, here is an end-of-the-year report from Poultney's Revitalization Committee:



## Keep an Eye on Poultney!

***Poultney residents are moving Poultney forward.*** A multi-day Community Visit by VCRD in the fall of 2002 was the impetus for residents to focus on making things happen in Poultney. Citizens identified 5 key areas that will enhance their quality of life and invigorate the economy. Task forces were formed for each area. The task forces combined with the non-profit Poultney Downtown Revitalization Committee (PDRC) with Timothy Kononan, the Community Visit Chair, as President. Each task force chairperson became a member of the PDRC; together they coordinate so that task forces work as part of a whole, provide input and share the planning of goals. Each meeting is open to the public.

Since the Community Visit, key people have acted as motivators to keep the spirit moving. Business people became more energized. The *only* volunteer Chamber of Commerce in the state became more innovative. Community groups became involved. What have they accomplished? A Public Forum to offer feedback to this small community of 3600 was held on October 29, 2003. Highlights of the forum included:

- ***The Adoption of a Proposed Community Vision*** which includes: 1) Maintained Vibrant Community Spirit; 2) Improved Educational System; 3) Moderate Economic Growth; 4) Preserved Historic Charm; 5) Enhanced Cultural, Social, & Shopping Amenities; 6) Slate Discovery Center; 7) Outdoor Life Retained; 8) Continued High Quality of Life.
- ***Economic Development Task Force Successes***
  - *An Economic Development Strategy* has been developed that includes sections on: 1) Capitalize on Our Assets; 2) History & Quality of Life; 3) GMC Advantage; 4) Educated Workforce; 5) Expanded Sewage & Water Capacity; 6) Environmental Expertise; 7) Attract Tourists; 8) Attract Knowledge Based industries; 9) Attract Specialty Retail Businesses; 10) Encourage Entrepreneurs
  - An aggressive *marketing plan* has been developed, reported to the community and is going forward. This includes developing a more visible web site with the aid of Green Mountain College and working with the Rutland regional marketing and economic development organizations to expand visibility both statewide and nationally.
  - *Stonebridge Inn* - Won total grant awards valued at more than \$700,000 to restore an architecturally significant building to contain a visitor tourist and information area, support services for children and families, and a conservation group at a key location approaching town. Voter support will be requested to proceed.
  - A *Vermont Community Development Planning Grant* was awarded to conduct a study to create a *Slate Discovery Center* that will showcase slate products, and teach architects, builders and craftsmen slate application knowledge.
  - The *Poultney Area Artists Guild* was founded in 2003 and already has had 3 very successful art shows to date.

- The *Horace Greeley Writers Guild* was established the summer of 2003, drawing members from Rutland and Washington (NY) Counties. There have been 3 successful Writers Guild meetings featuring local authors who discuss writing techniques and publication tips.
- A grant being pursued to establish a *community newsletter*, “The Poultney Voice,” to be written by and for the community.
- A *Streetscape* plan is in place, and grants have been awarded to begin implementation this summer.
- *Cell Phone Access* – This service is still eluding the area, but Poultney is planning to attempt to draw services.
- *Community Video* – An Orton grant has been won to gather perceptions and promote communication about the educational process via a community video. Partnerships have been formed within the community to work on this project.
- ***Education Task Force Successes:*** The committee mobilized public support in favor of a school budget designed to improve academic performance; encouraged school survey analysis which stimulated ideas to improve Poultney schools; goals include developing novel approaches to improving school facilities including the use of public/private partnerships, and helping communicate Coalition of Essential Schools academic improvement model.
- ***Community/College Partnership Task Force Success:*** Members are working together to identify and resolve common issues and have implemented the highly successful Poultney Partners program under which GMC students mentor Poultney elementary school children.
- ***Recreation Task Force Success*** – Last year, teen winter and spring activities were held, including a sledding party and two dances. These were well attended. Community organizations and Poultney middle and high school students are in the process of planning more activities for this school year. Grants for capital construction and recreation activities are being sought to expand recreational activities for middle and high school youths.

The involved citizens of Poultney are dedicated to making a difference. This past year shows that with hard work things can happen. Goals have been formed for 2004, including seeking Historical Bypass Designation for Route 30. Government staff at both the state and county levels have offered support, encouragement and information. Residents are determined to succeed – keep your eyes on Poultney!

*Submitted by Rosalie Cooksey, PDRC Economic Development Chairperson; 802-287-5131*

### **Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation; Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy**

Founded by VCRD in July, The Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) is examining the relationship between Vermont’s cultural expression, community life, and Vermont business. How does this relationship work, concretely, in Vermont? What can government, business, and the nonprofit sector do to shore up this relationship and increase economic activity?

VCCI holds the basic premise that there is a critical nexus between Vermont’s cultural life, community life, and economic life.

#### **Our Cultural Life**

- Anchors Community Development
- Inspires Innovation
- Nurtures Creativity in our young people, and in all Vermonters
- Makes people want to live here, building Vermont’s creative workforce
- Is a marketing tool: The Vermont Brand

The leadership team assembled as the VCCI has been charged by VCRD to examine the relationship between Vermont’s cultural life, community development, and economic activity, and develop a strategic plan to advance Vermont’s “creative economy.” To do this, VCCI has scheduled public forums throughout the state, built an annual schedule of research, and is taking testimony about models of community and economic development success. It will consolidate its findings in a set of policy recommendations and action plans by July of 2004 and then report to the Governor, Legislature, public, private and non-profit cultural institutions. Contact project leader, Michael Levine ([Levine@together.net](mailto:Levine@together.net)) to receive regular VCCI updates.

## **Broadband Telecom**

VCRD is working with several communities who are seeking to expand their broadband access at reasonable rates. Each community has different needs and may be at a different stage of the process, but generally VCRD helps the community assess and aggregate broadband demand and then negotiate to bring in a provider. Recently, VCRD has supported planning efforts in Burke, Island Pond, Waterford, Marshfield/Plainfield, and Brandon. Thanks to the Vermont Legislature, Senator Leahy's Office and our partners at the Vermont Broadband Council and Center for Rural Studies at UVM, VCRD Broadband facilitation services are available to any community in Vermont.

VCRD is also working with the Douglas Administration to plan ways that the State could use its leverage to promote the expansion of affordable broadband access to rural communities.

## **VCRD Membership Campaign**

In this first year Membership drive, VCRD has formalized its relationship with over 70 of its individual, business, and non-profit allies! We are proud to serve the people of rural Vermont in your partnership!

VCRD 2003 Membership will extend until the end of June, 2004. We are seeking additional members and hope to have reached 100 by the end of this year.

Members will join VCRD to promote opportunities in rural communities throughout the State of Vermont. VCRD Members will be invited to the bi-annual VCRD Rural Roundtables to participate in the 'summit-style' development of rural issues reports and action plans. Members will also receive VCRD program reports, quarterly newsletters, and listing in future VCRD Annual Reports. Finally, Members may participate as resources to communities and policy dialogues as appropriate.

To become a member of VCRD, send contact information (form attached) and a check for \$25 (individual) or \$100 (organization) to VCRD, PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601 or call 828-6022.

## **The Vermont Council on Rural Development**

Because of its neutrality and ability to bring diverse interests together, VCRD has a unique public policy role and a responsibility to raise questions that span organizational sectors and have broad import for the future of the state. VCRD welcomes your comments, your suggestions, your membership, and your support. Contact Paul Costello, Executive Director, at [vcrd@sover.net](mailto:vcrd@sover.net) or visit [www.sover.net/~vcrd](http://www.sover.net/~vcrd). VCRD is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## **A Very Little Humor**

Vermont folk sayings that document something of our economic development heritage:

“A dog is a man's best friend, but a good cow is more help at the table.”

“The early Robin looks for worms behind the plow.”

“Money won't buy happiness, but it's nice to choose your way to be unhappy.”

“The world is your cow, but you have to do the milking.”

\*\*\*

And a last thought: “Art creates emotion that produces citizenship.” Claudia Stern

### **Vermont Council on Rural Development**

89 Main Street, P.O. Box 1384

Montpelier, Vermont 05601

802-828-6024

[vcrd@sover.net](mailto:vcrd@sover.net)

[www.sover.net/~vcrd](http://www.sover.net/~vcrd)