



The Vermont Council on Rural Development Spring 2005 Newsletter

Welcome to the Spring VCRD Newsletter! From Hal Cohen, VCRD Board Chair

Muddy back roads, sudden warm days, rain instead of snow, and a new cycle of chores tells us that spring has finally sprung in Vermont. It's a time of renewal, a time of growth, and we are poised to join with you to do great things for our community!

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has turned the corner into 2005 by collaborating or leading major new initiatives at the local and state level. With all the challenges ahead, we see a renewal of partnerships, a rededication of local leadership to building unity and progress—as they define it—and statewide initiatives in support of this local leadership. We have the opportunity to make progress—if we pitch in together.

VCRD's mission is to enable and empower all Vermonters and Vermont communities to create a prosperous future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of local, state, federal, educational, and private resources. We look to improve our ability to serve, and to our partners to help us get it right. Thanks for your part in service to rural communities, and to Vermont!

VCRD Board Developments

On the VCRD Board only a couple of months, **Peter Mallary** has had to step away from the council to fulfill his challenging new responsibilities as director of the Democratic Party in Vermont.

At its March board meeting, VCRD elected **Paul Ralston** of Bristol to a private-sector opening on the board. Paul is an entrepreneur who founded the Bristol Bakery over 20 years ago and has since worked for Autumn Harp and The Body Shop before founding his current enterprise, the Vermont Coffee Company.

At the staff level, VCRD bids a grateful and fond farewell to **Candy Koenemann** who has led the Council's administrative management for six years. We welcome **Tracey Pearson** (828-6022, vcrd2@sover.net) who has recently been hired as VCRD Executive Assistant.

2005 Rural Summit Conference

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is holding a roundtable conference this summer to address the challenges of building unity in the face of social, economic, and cultural change:

“Beyond the Divide; Conflict and Paths to Community Success”

We'd like to invite you to come, but we need your contact information!

Please send your Name, Address, Phone and Email Address to us by return email at vcrd2@sover.net, and we will add you to our invitation list!

Where: Vermont Statehouse, Montpelier

When: August 9, 2005, 9:00 to 4:00

VCRD's annual roundtable conference will look at the challenges rural communities face in building bridges between parts of the community to get things done. The conference will balance presentations by experts with participant discussions that analyze the ways communities throughout Vermont have responded to challenging social, cultural, and demographic differences. Participants will put their ideas on the table, share

success stories, and learn from each other (and from providers) about tools and resources available to communities.

VCRD Application TO EDA For Vermont Forest Products Marketing

With support from the **Office of Senator Jeffords**, The Vermont Council on Rural Development has applied for federal support from the Economic Development Administration to implement key features of the recommendations of the **Vermont Forest Products Council**. This project would supply resources to industry-leading non-profits through competitive RFP processes to address five critical economic development strategies over the next two years:

Marketing the Vermont Wood Products Brand

The project will commission a marketing plan designed to organize a collaborative, statewide effort among wood products mills, manufacturers, and crafts people to cooperatively market Vermont wood products through the Vermont brand, so that each product advertises all the others.

Building VT Forest Products Presence at Lodging Facilities

The project will facilitate the placement and showcasing of Vermont wood furniture and other wood products in Vermont inns, other lodging facilities, and additional promotional avenues.

Factory Tours, Open Studios, and Other Demonstration Sites

The project will commission a Vermont non-profit organization to work with the wood products industry to create a statewide factory tour and open studio/showroom program (including signage, publications, and promotional efforts) that could begin with an open studio/factory weekend similar to that presently sponsored for the Vermont Crafts Council.

Trade Show Support

The project will contract with a Vermont non-profit to publicize and promote the Vermont brand at wood products trade shows, such as the annual International Home Furnishings Market® in High Point, North Carolina. The primary purpose of such a presence would be to raise potential future purchasers' awareness of the key brand attributes of Vermont wood products and build a unified market presence to expand sales of Vermont participants.

Annual Showcase and Design Competition for Vermont Wood Products

The project will commission a Vermont non-profit to convene a yearly high-profile event to showcase the Vermont wood industry and all its products. The Annual Vermont Forest Products Showcase will feature a **Design Competition** to both stimulate and publicly celebrate new product designs and support their entrance into the marketplace. The Showcase and Design Competition will situate Vermont as a design leader, build contacts to individual and wholesale buyers and architects, and enhance the association of the Vermont brand with cutting-edge design.

Vermont Council on Planning

The Vermont Council on Planning (VCP), founded and produced by VCRD, is more than halfway through its deliberations and is beginning the process of formulating the central recommendations for its final report to the Governor, Legislature and people of Vermont. The VCP is currently taking input from business and environmental leaders, regional planning and development agencies, and municipal leaders from throughout Vermont. The Council will publish its report in October 2005.

Members of the Vermont Council on Planning

Bob Ackland, Sugarbush

Stanley Borofsky, Sam's Outdoor Outfitters

Andy Broderick, ED, Housing Vermont

Greg Brown, ED, Chittenden County Planning Commission
Elizabeth Courtney, ED, VT Natural Resources Council
Kevin Dorn, Secretary, Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Joseph Giancola, Giancola Construction
Paul Gillies, Tarrant Marks & Gillies
John Hall, Commissioner, Housing and Community Affairs
Beth Humstone, ED, Forum on Sprawl
Steven Jeffrey, ED, VT League of Cities and Towns
Representative Bill Johnson, Chair, House Natural Resources
Steven Kerr, Secretary, Agency of Agriculture and Marketing
Lee Krohn, Manchester Municipal Planner
Jolinda LaClair, State Director, USDA Rural Development (VCP Chair)
Senator Ginny Lyons, Chair, Senate Natural Resources
Pat McDonald, Secretary, VTrans, Agency of Transportation
Sharon Murray, Legislative Coordinator, VT Planners Association
Pat Moulton Powden, Chair, Vermont Environmental Board
Chuck Ross, State Director, Senator Leahy's Office
Brian Searles, St. Albans City Manager
Dawn Terrill, Secretary, Agency of Transportation
Kirk Waite, Chair, Georgia Selectboard
Paul Costello, ED, Vermont Council on Rural Development (Producer)
Peg Elmer, Associate Member, Department of Housing and Community Affairs
Brenda Hausauer, Project Manager

Community Visits

VCRD has been working with the community of **Chelsea, Vermont** over the last few months as residents consider the challenges and opportunities ahead and set priorities for future action. On March 29, the Council brought a 30-person Community Visit Team to Chelsea to attend 9 forums on issues before the community. A Town Meeting on April 26 prioritized those opportunities and residents have lined up to take collective action. Future meetings will help volunteer committees organize and set agendas for their work over the next year.

On the invitation of the town selectboard, VCRD has selected the community of **Woodstock** for a Community Visit in the fall of 2005. The Council will soon begin the process of identifying communities for 2006 Visits and welcomes nominations and recommendations from communities, individuals and our partnering organizations.



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

With the Fall 2004 release of the **VCCI report, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy***, VCRD launched a statewide campaign to communicate with Vermonters about the power of the creative economy. This campaign will run until June 2005. Our goals for this campaign include:

- ⇒ Create broad awareness of the existence of the creative economy in Vermont, enabling Vermonters to see the creative economy at work around them.
- ⇒ Build specific awareness of creative economy principles in towns and villages that might benefit from application of those principles within the local context of economic development projects.
- ⇒ Build momentum to facilitate realization of VCCI recommendations.

Led by **Liz Stedman** of Kimbell Sherman Ellis, VCRD's campaign has four primary trajectories: a statewide press campaign, organization of regional forums, meetings with and presentations to key business organizations, and conversations with government officials. Key to the effort has been the active involvement of entrepreneurs whose businesses rely on innovation, like **Tony Elliott from SoVerNet, John Wall of Wall/Goldfinger, and Karen Fortin of the Carman Brook Maple and Dairy Farm**. These spokespeople embody and are able to speak to the connection between a rich cultural life, Vermont's heritage, and local economic development.

VCRD is now working with local leaders in Vermont communities who hope to advance local development goals by generating discussion about creative economy principles and building practical strategic plans. Community forums have recently been held in **Bellows Falls** and **St. Johnsbury**. Forums are currently being organized in **St. Albans** on May 12 (6:30-8:30, at City Hall), in **Rutland** on June 9, and other communities. Thanks to funding from **Jane's Trust**, VCRD is able to provide press and organizational facilitation to help each of these communities build momentum.

Meanwhile, other communities throughout Vermont--like **Brattleboro** and **Newport**--are moving forward with Creative Economy planning efforts. **VT House** members in the bipartisan **Rural Economic Development Working Group** continue to meet weekly to think about how the VCCI recommendations can advance rural development. And federal, state, non-profit and business leaders throughout Vermont are considering ways to support communities as they work to realize the full potential of these opportunities to boost community and economic development. Vermont's cultural resources, authentic communities, inventive entrepreneurs and creative work force give us tremendous advantages to capture brand identity as a center of creative business development!

A NEW INITIATIVE!: Northeast Kingdom Wi Fi Telecom Project

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) has recently secured a **USDA RD RBOG** grant to implement a network of internet Wi Fi hotspots across the Northeast Kingdom! For the last few years with help from **Senator Leahy's Office, the Sustainable Jobs Fund, UVM's Center for Rural Studies, The Broadband Council and USDA RD**, VCRD's Rural Broadband Project has assisted Vermont's rural areas in obtaining affordable broadband service. Led by **Al and Laura Duey**, this work is ongoing, and has contributed to Vermont's progress in rural deployment: the availability of high speed Internet is on the rise in the Northeast Kingdom and throughout rural Vermont.

The increased availability of broadband is a good start, but to be effective the Internet must be used for economically important applications. Wi Fi hotspots are a great way to popularize the use of broadband—and great points of access where service may be otherwise unavailable. Wi Fi provides a wireless blanket in a business so that customers can come in, open their laptops, and be connected almost instantly to fast internet service. Visitors to Vermont are clear: they want the ability to "stay connected" while they are traveling for business or pleasure. The existence of a hotspot network will allow the Northeast Kingdom to present itself as rural, but not isolated. Visitors will be able to easily stay connected when they need to, whether at their lodgings or throughout the region as they explore the NEK's many offerings. "Last mile" residents of the Kingdom, who still have not obtained broadband access to their homes, will also be able to connect through this network of locations throughout the Kingdom. These hotspots will also help businesses, from inns to coffee shops, attract more customers—each will advertise the others, boost business, and give residents and visitors new opportunities to communicate, investigate, and do business on the web.

A major goal of this project is to bring greater value to independent hotspots by creating a common NEK interface, which can be easily used by both tourists and residents as they travel across the region. The project will also ensure the sustainability of the hotspot network by developing a process for expanding participation and marketing to benefit participating NEK businesses.

VCRD Membership Campaign

Join us! Last year, VCRD's membership campaign formalized partnerships with over 100 individuals and organizations. To become a member of VCRD, send contact information (see form below) and a check for \$25 (individual), \$100 (organization) or \$500 (leadership) to VCRD, PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601, or call 828-6022. Thanks!

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 or visit www.sover.net/~vcrd. VCRD is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Vermont Council on Rural Development

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VCRD Membership Form



Members join VCRD partners in promoting opportunities in rural communities throughout the State of Vermont. Members receive VCRD program reports, quarterly newsletters, Annual Reports, and may participate as resources to communities and policy dialogues as appropriate. To become a member of VCRD, send contact information and a check for \$25 (Individual), \$100 (Organization), or \$500 (Leadership Contribution) to VCRD, PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development deeply appreciates the partnership of our members in the work of the Council. Annual membership dues help cover the operating expenses of the VCRD.

VCRD is a 501(c)(3) non profit. Our VT State Tax ID number is 125249 and our Federal ID number is 03-0354510.

Please make check payable to: Vermont Council on Rural Development. Thank you so much for your support!

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|----------------------|-------|-------|---|
| Organization: | _____ | _____ | \$ 25.00 Individual Member Dues |
| Name/Title: | _____ | _____ | \$100.00 Organization Member Dues |
| Address: | _____ | _____ | \$500.00 Leadership Contribution |
| | _____ | | |
| Phone: | _____ | | Please make check payable to: |
| Fax: | _____ | | <u>Vermont Council on Rural Development.</u> |
| Email: | _____ | | |

Thank you so much for your support!

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