



RURAL ROUTES

The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc.

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NC to lead the nation in statewide web connectivity

2001 Rural Partners Forum

North Carolina has embarked on what is arguably the most ambitious plan in the nation to link an entire state via the Internet, a plan that state and local leaders say will lead us toward a stable economy, high achieving schools and a better quality of life for rural North Carolinians.



U.S. Senator John Edwards addresses the crowd at the Rural Partners Forum

"Look further down the road...to the next quarter century," asked keynote speaker U.S. Senator John Edwards of the more than 700 people gathered for the 2001 Rural Partners Forum in late November. "There is no state in this country that is better positioned to take advantage of the information economy than North Carolina. We have the best state university system, the

strongest community college system in the country, and we're home to some of the most dynamic technology companies in the world," Edwards said.

Dubbed "Rural N.C. Goes Online," the Rural Center's tenth annual partners event was held Nov. 29 and 30 at the North Raleigh Hilton, and was sponsored jointly by the center and e-NC, an initiative of the Rural Internet Access Authority to bring web access to all North Carolinians by December 2003.

The time is now, Edwards said in his address, for the big commitments needed to close the digital divide that separates counties like Graham and Cherokee from the economic opportunities enjoyed in Wake and Durham. "Just as we give tax credits for research and experimentation, to help develop new technology, we ought to give tax credits to companies that share its benefits, by bringing broadband service to rural and low-income areas," Edwards said.

Edwards said the partnerships created by linking all 100 North Carolina counties are not only integral to achieving a united, economically sound North Carolina,

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Rural Forum speaker highlights *Challenges, rewards to come*



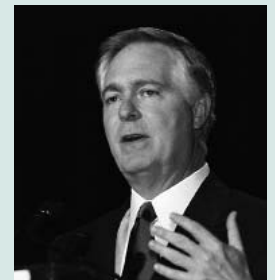
Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue

On the new North Carolina economy

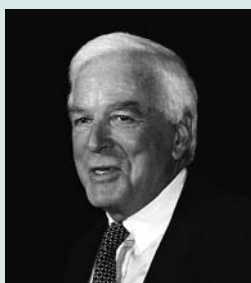
"I like the fact that we're finally able to admit that we're not going to look the way we looked before, that we're amidst a restructure. You know what we're going to have to do to make North Carolina the state it was during the industrial revolution. My goal for us and your goal for us is to position North Carolina as the leading state in America now, in the new economy, the information economy."

On the Internet's role in education

"The number one incentive that we have in North Carolina is a prepared work force. We are going to have to continue the distance learning...to stay competitive. Every child in this state ought to have the opportunity to play in the winner's circle in our economy, and in order to do that they are going to have to have the high speed internet access (others) have. Ya'll know about my rural roots. I want to see us be able to live where we want to in the future, instead of where we have to."



Governor Mike Easley



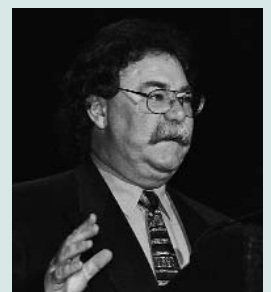
Dr. James Leutze

On the e-NC project

"I think it's fair to say it's the most ambitious program in the entire United States to connect an entire state, and it's remarkable also because of the partnerships that have been formed trying to do this. This is a first in the country. We have the most elaborate and most detailed website of technology infrastructure anywhere in the entire United States that will be extremely helpful in bring businesses to North Carolina."

On Connect NB Branché, an Internet program in New Brunswick, Canada

"About seven years ago our province undertook a similar project. We've seen our entire province become e-literate, if you will. We've seen a 30 percent growth in information technology. In our province of 750,000 people, we've had 250,000 visits to our community access centers. We were invited down here to share our stories. We came down here to wish you good luck, but today we say 'congratulations, you've made it.'"



Gary Wood

e-CHAMPIONS

Bringing Internet access to all 85 rural counties in North Carolina is no small task. It will require e-NC to work closely with each community every step along the way to communicate needs, coordinate schedules and training, report progress, etc. e-NC leaders have designated e-champions for each participating county who will serve as liaisons with the Rural Internet Access Authority in accomplishing the project's missions. They are listed below.

County	Champion	Email Address
Alamance	Jeff Causey	jeff.causey@alamance-nc.com
Alexander	Duaine Coley	Hidnight@aol.com
Alleghany	Chris Robinson	robinsonc@gw.wilkes.cc.nc.us
Anson	Chris Wease	cwease@email.co.anson.nc.us
Ashe	John Weatherspoon	planning@ashcountygov.com
Avery	Randy Baird	rbaird@boone.net
Beaufort	Penny Sermons	pennys@email.beaufort.cc.nc.us
Bertie	Marshall Cherry	marshall.cherry@roanoke.ncemcs.com
Bladen	Chuck Huestess	edc@bladenco.org
Brunswick	Cynthia Tart	cistart@aol.com
Burke	Steve Farlow	sgfarlow@bcpls.org
Cabarrus	Steve Hicks	jshicks@co.cabarrus.nc.us
Caldwell	John Thus	jthus@aol.com
Camden	Carl Classen	cclassen@ecamden.cc
Carteret	Dave Inscoc	edc@carteret.cc.nc.us
Caswell	Thomas J. Edmonds	tedmonds@caswellinc.com
Chatham	Bret Pedigo	bret@emji.net
Cherokee	Jim Bell	jbelle@tccc.cc.nc.us
Chowan	Bill Miller	wgmiller6@home.com
Clay	Andy Gibson	agibson@clayschools.org
Cleveland	Scott Fite	scott.fite@clevelandcounty.com
Columbus	Beverlee Nance	bnance@mail.southeast.cc.nc.us
Craven	Ken Wallace	kwallace@csc.craven.cc.nc.us
Cumberland	Juanita Pilgrim	jpilgrim@co.cumberland.nc.us
Currituck	Tina Scanlon	tscanlon@co.currituck.nc.us
Dare	Tom Gray	gray@co.dare.nc.us
Davie	Neal Smith	neil.smith@co.davie.nc.us
Duplin	Lynn Lucas	lmclucas@yahoo.com
Eastern Band of the Cherokee	Henry Chiltoskie	chili@wnc.net
Edgecombe	Larry Flowers	lflowers@co.edgecombe.nc.us
Franklin	Lucy T. Allen	lwta312@aol.com
Gates	Reba Green-Holley	Reba_Green-Holley@ncsu.edu
Graham	Donna Tipton	dtipton@tccc.cc.nc.us
Granville	Doug Colquitt	doug@colquittfamily.org
Greene	Sandra Warren	sandra_h_warren@hotmail.com
Guilford	Bill Nash	bnash@co.guilford.nc.us
Halifax	Willa Dickens	dickensw@halifax.hcc.cc.nc.us
Harnett	Paula Stewart	pstewart@harnett.org
Haywood	Richard Honeycutt	rhoneycutt@gov.co.haywood.nc.us
Henderson	David E. Nicholson	davidn@hendersoncountync.org
Hertford	Brewster Brown	brownb@roanoke.cc.nc.us
Hoke	Carolyn Olivarez	colivarez@hcs.k12.nc.us
Hyde	Alice M. Keeney	hydecopl@beachlink.com

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Rural Partners Forum *from page 1*

they will surely be necessary in mending the divide between rural and urban schools. "If we want to build a foundation for the Information Age, then we ought to ensure that every child goes to a school that is well-built, fully modernized, and equipped with the latest textbooks and technology," Edwards said. "We need to give (rural schools) more flexibility in how they spend federal funds – because it's time to tear down the digital and educational divides."

Edwards was quick to extol the benefits of using information technology to further the trend toward telemedicine, a favorite topic of the senator, who complained that quality health care is sometimes seen as a "geographical luxury."

Rural Internet Access Authority announces action plan for e-NC

If rural connectivity is to become a reality, each county must have a human infrastructure in place to go along with the technological component, say e-NC leaders, who announced at the forum an ambitious \$6.3 million program to create e-communities initiatives in each of the state's 85 rural counties. Dr. James Leutze, chancellor of UNC Wilmington and chairman of e-NC, called the initiative "the backbone of our effort to get North Carolinians connected to the Internet."

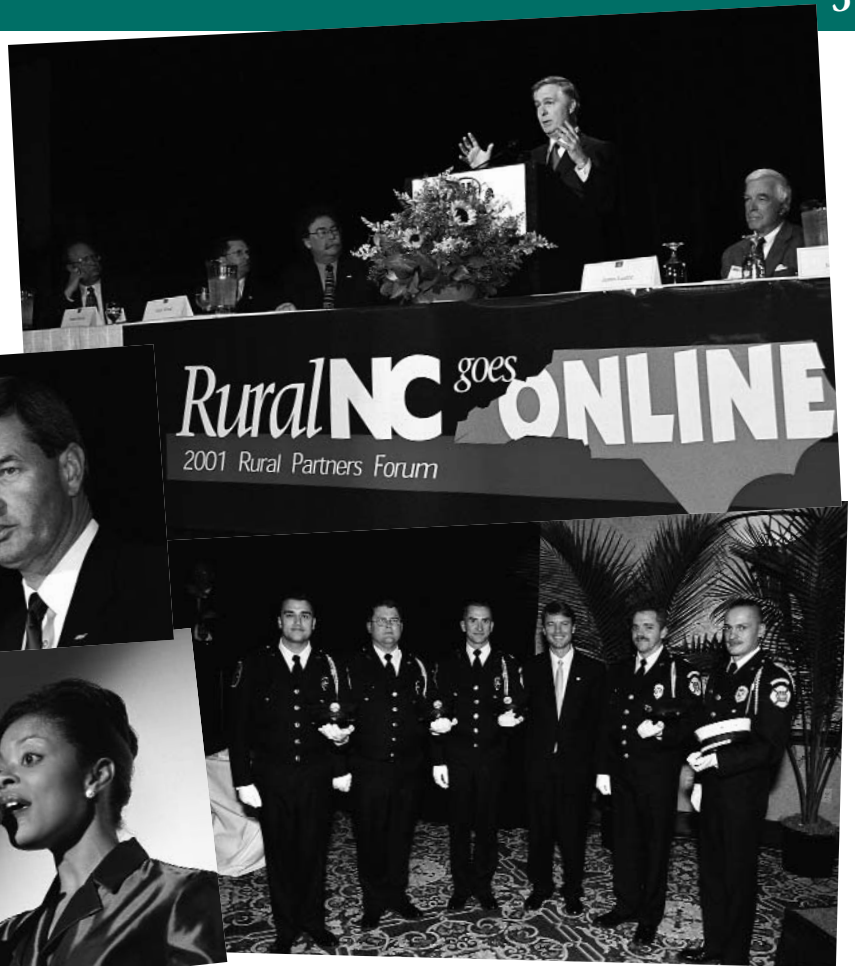
The e-communities initiative works this way: counties first signal their wish to be a part of the project, and then designate an e-champion, or someone who will head up the connectivity effort in their community; the county then appoints a local steering committee representing the broad constituencies of the community and sends representatives to training sessions sponsored by the authority; public meetings are held to gather input from the community and lastly, the counties develop a connectivity plan after assessing what technological resources are available and prioritizing any other needs within the community.

Grants of up to \$5,000 were awarded in December to help the most economically distressed counties bring together civic leaders who are leading the effort in their communities, followed by \$10,000 for each rural county to defray the costs of developing a connectivity plan. The e-communities initiative has been under way since early December, and though counties are at varying places in their plans, most are currently apply-

ing grant monies toward the planning phase and for public outreach sessions.

Getting folks together and building the infrastructure is only part of the connectivity challenge, e-NC leaders say. Training is a big factor, and to accomplish that e-NC will use student volunteers to help residents and businesses get their Internet connections up and running. The project calls for two volunteers in place in each county by 2003.

The initiative met one of its first goals in late January when five telecenters were established in Alleghany, Cherokee, Duplin, Martin and Robeson counties to serve as training centers. The next step is for the authority to complete three surveys that will help them gauge attitudes and awareness toward the Internet, as well as how county health departments use information technology.



Clockwise from top: Governor Easley; U.S. Senator John Edwards with Buncombe County Firefighters Association Honor Guard; staff member Hazel Edmond; Rural Center chairman Kelly King

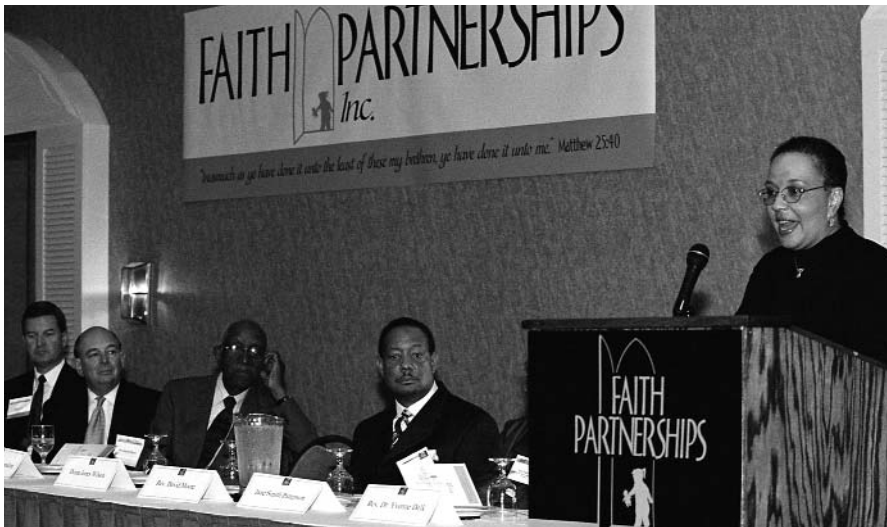
Technology 2001 Exhibition

Forum participants connect to North Carolina's future

So what will a connected North Carolina look like in the years to come? Realizing the question was bound to pique the interest of forum participants, the Rural Center and the Rural Internet Access Authority solicited some help in creating a technology exhibit showcasing a range of online opportunities.

- ECU's Brody School of Medicine hosted a full-scale physician's work station in the Health Care Online exhibit. Participants got a hands-on demonstration of how doctors working remotely can monitor a patient's vital statistics and confer with other doctors in developing a course of treatment.
- SAS Institute demonstrated its new multi-media, web based instructional software that can be used in conjunction with traditional classroom instruction.
- Wachovia was on hand to exhibit the efficiency of paying bills online, and to show users how to find the best e-commerce sites related to their business or personal interests.
- The N.C. Office of Information Technology demonstrated its popular portal 'NC @ Your Service,' and other services meant to cut down on government bureaucracy.
- Crestline Homes invited everyone into their "smart house," a 1,700 square foot home built to provide homeowners the utmost in computer and technological convenience.





Faith Partnerships President Diana Jones Wilson addresses guests at kick off ceremony.

Faith Partnerships, Inc. strikes out with a new mission

More than 100 people gathered at the North Raleigh Hilton on the eve of the Rural Partners Forum Nov. 29 to support a new partnership aimed at giving faith-based organizations the tools necessary to help their communities overcome difficult challenges. Faith Partnerships, Inc. will bring community leaders, churches, religious groups and businesses together in delivering services to those that might otherwise be overlooked.

The new non-profit group will continue and expand upon the work being done the last eight years at the Rural Center through the Communities of Faith Initiative. President Diana Jones Wilson, former director of the initiative, will lead the new partnership.

Heading up the panel of speakers at the kick-off event were the Rev. W. Joseph Mann, chairman of Faith Partnerships' board of directors, and the Right Rev. Cecil Bishop, vice chairman of the board. Among the special guests was esteemed U.S. historian John Hope Franklin, who helped draft the legal brief that led to the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education decision.

Charged with empowering religious organizations to make the kind of socio-

economic changes that can take hold and grow in distressed communities, Faith Partnerships, Inc. – with funding from the Ford Foundation, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the Duke Endowment –



Celebrating a new start: (l-r) Diana Jones Wilson, the Rev. W. Joseph Mann & Joe Crocker of Wachovia

will endeavor to bring faith-based groups know-how in everything from grant writing to holding computer training and small business seminars. In addition, faith groups will learn how to become more independent in providing these services, and how to track the success of their individual programs.

Faith Partnerships, Inc. moved into its new 6th floor office space in the Wachovia building on Fayetteville Street on Jan. 2. Wachovia donated the space, and the Duke Endowment provided office furnishings. The organization will hold its annual conference March 7 and 8, entitled "Stepping Stones to Greater Service" at Raleigh's St. Paul AME Church. The conference will offer technical assistance and training for churches across the state, a grant-writing seminar and lessons in how to leverage services with like-minded organizations. For more information, call Faith Partnerships at (919) 834-8335.

Rural Center grants & gifts in October-December 2001

U.S. Small Business Administration – \$200,000 to support the Microenterprise Loan Program.

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation – \$450,000 in support of Rural Center general operations. The three-year grant was awarded in November 2001 and takes effect in July 2002.

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation – \$50,000 for the Communities of Faith Initiative.

Ford Foundation – \$250,000 for the Communities of Faith Initiative.

Sponsors of the 2001 Rural Partners Forum

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IBM
Jordan Lumber & Supply, Inc.
McGill Associates
Philip Morris
Rivers and Associates
Sprint
Verizon

Partner

Cavanaugh & Associates
Compaq
Family Dollar, Inc.
McDavid & Associates, Inc.
McKim & Creed
Miller Brewing
Southern Bank Foundation
Syngenta
The Wooten Company

Rural Center Board approves funding for community development corporations

The Rural Center's Minority Economic Development Advisory Committee met in November to review 47 proposals made by existing and new community development corporations (CDCs) and make recommendations to the center's board of directors.

With \$1,050,000 in available funding, and \$2,540,900 in requests, the challenge was to apply the overall goals of the CDC Grants Program to each project requesting funds to determine viability. The Rural Center's board of directors then awarded 31 grants – 26 to previously funded CDCs and five to new and emerging CDCs – according to each project's stage of development and track record of completed projects.

The Rural Center's CDC Grants Program provides financial assistance to minority community development corporations to enable them to improve the economic well-being and quality of life in their communities.

Grants awarded for 2001 are as follows:

Previously Funded

Bertie, Martin, Washington CDC: \$32,000
 Blue Springs-Hoke CDC: \$32,000
 Coastal CDC: \$32,000
 Community Housing Development Corp.: \$32,000
 Cumberland Regional Improvement Corp.: \$32,000
 Eagle Market Street CDC: \$32,000
 East Winston CDC: \$32,000
 FACED: \$32,000
 Gate City CDC: \$32,000
 Goler-Depot Street Renaissance CDC: \$32,000
 Greater Kinston CDC: \$32,000
 Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe: \$32,000
 Kingdom CDC: \$32,000
 Olive Hill CDC: \$32,000
 Pantego Area Community Developers: \$32,000
 QUOLA: \$32,000
 Rebuilding Broken Places CDC: \$32,000
 Rural Initiative Project, Inc.: \$32,000
 Sampson County Minorities for Progressive Government: \$32,000
 South Lee Street Neighborhood Improvement: \$32,000
 Tyrrell County CDC: \$32,000
 UHURU CDC: \$32,000
 United Family Support Services CDC: \$32,000
 Warren Family Institute: \$32,000
 West End Revitalization CDC: \$32,000
 West Greenville CDC: \$32,000

New and Emerging

Columbus County DREAM Center: \$40,000
 Community Empowerment Project, Inc.: \$40,000
 New Life CDC: \$40,000
 One Dozen Who Care: \$40,000
 Southside Alliance for Neighborhood Empowerment: \$40,000

E-CHAMPIONS *from page 2*

County	Champion	Email Address
Iredell	Kenneth Vance	kenneth.vance@bankofamerica.com
Jackson	Larry Tucker	lwtucker@earthlink.net
Johnston	Darry McGraw	mcgrawdarryl@novell.johnston.cc.nc.us
Jones	Larry P. Meadows	cdavenport@co.jones.nc.us
Lee	Nancy Turner	nturner@gw.ccarolina.cc.nc.us
Lenoir	David Edwards	dedwards@ncgtp.com
Lincoln	Audrey Setzer	asetzer@lincolncounty.org
Macon	Andy Muncey	amuncey@maconnc.org
Madison	Anita Davie	auditors@madison.main.nc.us
Martin	Dennis Griffin	dgriffin@martinncc.com
McDowell	Virginia Mitchell	virginiam@mail.mcdowell.cc.nc.us
Mecklenburg	Tracy Greene	tgreene@ci.charlotte.nc.us
Mitchell	Kathy Young	kyoung@mitchell.main.nc.us
Montgomery	Judy Stevens	jws@connectnc.net
Moore	Marilyn Neely	neelym@email.sandhills.cc.nc.us
Nash	Hope Lynch	Hope.Lynch@ncmail.net
New Hanover	Mark Boyer	mboyer@nhcgov.com
Northampton	Willa Dickens	dickensw@halifax.hcc.cc.nc.us
Onslow	Mona Padrick	mpadrick@jacksonvilleonline.org
Orange	Dick Taylor	dtaylor@co.orange.nc.us
Pamlico	Ann Holton	pamlico_plan@coastalnet.com
Pasquotank	Marion Sofield	msofield@simflex.com
Pender	Martin Beach	beachm@pendercounty.com
Perquimans	Victor Eure	veure@pcs.k12.nc.us
Person	Randy Reynolds	reynoldr@piedmont.cc.nc.us
Pitt	Michael Taylor	mctaylor@co.pitt.nc.us
Polk	Mark Pumphrey	mpumphrey@publib.polknc.org
Randolph	Jeff Hurley	jahurley@randolph.cc.nc.us
Richmond	Jimmy Quick	jimmy.quick@ncmail.net
Robeson	Sylvia H. Pate	sylvia.pate@uncp.edu
Rockingham	Ginger Waynick	gwaynick@www.co.rockingham.nc.us
Rowan	David Boling	bolingde@co.rowan.nc.us
Rutherford	Richard Burke	rburke@blueridge.net
Sampson	J. W. Simmons	jwsimmons@sampson.cc.nc.us
Scotland	Bob Kendall	
Stanly	Eddie Goss	Egoss@co.stanly.nc.us
Stokes	Ron Morgan	stokescounty@alltel.net
Surry	David Adkisson	oggy@adv.net
Swain	John Tyndall	jtyndall@fontanalib.org
Transylvania	Larry Moss	larrymoss@citcom.net
Tyrrell	Brenda Mixon	pfs@beachlink.com
Union	Charlene Broome	vision2020@dasia.net
Vance	Richard A. Seekins	rseekins@kerrtarcog.org
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Warren	Shelly Fearn	library@gloryroad.net
Washington	Tracy Phillips-Berk	coadmin@washingtoncountygov.com
Watauga	Paul Combs	combsjp@appstate.edu
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Wilson	Ellis Williford	ewilliford@wilson-co.com
Yadkin	Chuck Goad	cgoad@yadkincounty.gov
Yancey	Steve Gouge	gougesteve@hotmail.com



Lawrence Davenport, chair of the Golden LEAF board of directors, and Rural Center president Billy Ray Hall at the burley tobacco market opening in Asheville.

Burley Marketing Center a success during first season

As the tobacco season came to an end this winter, the state's first-ever burley tobacco marketing center met or exceeded expectations in all areas, according to the center's sponsor, the Agricultural Advancement Consortium. The market received funding from the Tobacco Trust Fund, and the consortium has secured funding to make the market available again in 2002.

In addition to enhancing competitiveness in the marketplace, the center's opening put a new twist on the traditional tobacco auction, a practice that has slowly given way to direct contracts between growers and buyers over the last several years. Seen as both a way to preserve the tobacco auction heritage while addressing quality and efficiency concerns associated with auctions, the center aspires to be a viable alternative for buyers and growers alike.

The Asheville marketing center, which opened Nov. 13 and closed Feb. 4, handled 70 percent of all the burley tobacco sold in the state this year. Final figures show a total sales of 5.4 million pounds through six buyers. The center faced challenges with regard to pricing and delivery scheduling, yet organizers say buyers and sellers taking part this season were pleased overall and would like to

see the program continue next season.

Tobacco marketed through the center brought growers an average price of \$1.93 per pound, compared with the burley market average of \$1.95 and a contract station average of \$1.99 per pound. Buyers reported fewer problems with nested bales and higher overall leaf quality, and participating graders said they, too, noticed more quality and efficiency improvements.

The consortium, a 24-member board made up of farmers, elected officials and civic and business leaders, was created by the General Assembly in 2000 to ensure farming's long-term vitality in North Carolina. The consortium plans to survey everyone who took part in the first season to gauge the center's effectiveness. Look for the results in the spring edition of *Rural Routes*.

CEED program publishes findings, meets goals

The Rural Center has issued a final report on its two-year Community Education for Enterprise Development project. The report tracks the progress of five North Carolina communities as they explore ways to strengthen their role in nurturing small business growth. Called "Saying 'Yes' to Small Business," the report describes each community's experiences and the lessons they learned.

The eight-page report is available online at www.ncruralcenter.org in the publications section. Or it can be purchased for \$3.00 by calling Megan Miller in the Rural Center's communications office at (919) 250-4314.

Civic Ventures Fund awards \$235,000 in grants for sustainable communities

Twenty-two counties in the western part of the state will soon benefit from the Rural Center's Sustainable Communities Initiative, created in 2000 to assist struggling counties as they undertake projects to rejuvenate their communities.

The initiative will help to bring new life to counties needing an economic boost, to be accomplished through leadership development, technical assistance, and development and implementation grants. Grants are made available by way of the Civic Ventures Fund, one of three programs making up the initiative. This first round of grants is intended as a one-year test model.

With funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Rural Center considered 42 grant proposals before awarding funding to 15 projects that will serve 22 counties. Two additional projects are under consideration.

Project award winners were announced Nov. 29. They are:

Town of Spruce Pine: \$5,000 for a feasibility study to determine the best multi-purpose use for a vacant building that was donated to the town.

Town of Burnsville: \$5,000 for continued planning in the town's revitalization of Burnsville's historic town square.

Land of Sky Regional Council: \$5,000 for developing the "Sense of Place" initiative identified by the council's strategic planning committee for helping the area attract growth and development.

Alliance for Human Service, Partnership for Health and Designing our Future: \$5,000 for an outreach and education campaign, cultural competency workshops and various community workshops.

Caldwell Community College: \$5,000 for the Strengthening Families/Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force.

A RURAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL TO WATCH...Kenaf Project

AVE Chatauqua and One Dozen Who Care: \$5,000 for development and promotion of the Andrews Valley Experience, a heritage and cultural event in Andrews.

Northwest Alliance Community Development Corporation: \$5,000 to both establish the CDC and hasten its ability to begin serving an eight county region in northwest North Carolina.

Center for Participatory Change, Cooperative Extension: \$25,000 to implement four programs of the Appalachian Farm Project – a livestock project, micro-grant matching program, native plant project and tailgate farmers market.

HandMade in America: \$25,000 to provide technical assistance and training to 11 communities participating in the Small Towns program.

Town of Burnsville: \$25,000 for streetscape improvements in downtown Burnsville.

Sylva Partners in Renewal: \$25,000 for the revitalization of Mill Street.

Mountain Valleys Resource Conservation and Development & Mountain Partners in Agriculture: \$25,000 for addition of new retailers, a regional roundtable series and a community incubator for their Get Fresh – Buy Appalachian campaign.

Town of Fletcher: \$25,000 for the second round of a project to connect an existing town park and greenway trail to the sidewalk system in the heart of Fletcher business district.

Madison County: \$25,000 for residents of the Rollins community to attend the Mars Hill REAL Mentoring Program and to provide them scholarships to Asheville and Buncombe Tech.

Partnerships for the Future: \$25,000 to add a staff member who will coordinate committees, move projects forward, and raise funds for the partnership's efforts.

Will North Carolina kenaf become the engineered lumber of the future, capable of replacing trees in making paper products? Might it someday be used for construction in the place of plywood? Conservationists say yes, but the business world isn't yet sure, and Greene County farmers eager to establish the fibrous crop are discovering its North Carolina future has more to do with practicality than with market niche.

Faced with dwindling tobacco allotments, a group of eastern North Carolina farmers sought help from the General Assembly in early 2000 exploring new crops with the potential to fill the gaping holes left by the absence of the golden leaf. Not only did kenaf farmers have to prove the crop – grown primarily in India, Asia and Africa but gaining in popularity in the United States – could be grown in eastern North Carolina, they had to determine its market and how to process the crop without a nearby facility.

With \$300,000 in funding from the General Assembly, administered through the Rural Center, the Carolina Kenaf Farmers Foundation set out in July 2000. The foundation's original plan was to establish a manufacturing facility that would produce panelboard and engineered lumber products for the construction industry, but a lack of funding and time pushed that goal to the back burner, at least for the foreseeable future. The other alternative in manufacturing kenaf – which produces a hearty, stalk-like 12-foot plant that yields a crop in a four to five month growing season – is to process it through a fiber separation, or decortication, facility. Separated kenaf can be used for a variety of products, including equine bedding and as oil absorbent filler in manufacturing.



Harvesting a kenaf field in Greene County

A need for efficiency prompted farmers to abandon immediate plans for a Snow Hill processing facility and take the crop directly to Dynea, a large manufacturer of thermoset resins.

North Carolina kenaf farmers know important tests remain in establishing the crop in a market economy, yet are buoyed by the crop having passed two important challenges in 2000 and 2001: first, it produced a healthy crop that yielded six tons of baled fiber per acre, proving that North Carolina's soil and temperature conditions are favorable; second, Greene County farmers formed a company, Greene Natural Fibers, that farmers hope will provide a market for their kenaf in the future.

In their most recent report to the Rural Center, the foundation reported an Indiana company, Flexform Technologies, has made a commitment to purchase the entire fiber product of the 2001 crop. Additionally, the foundation says it has seen interest from marketing companies now handling European bast fiber products to wrap up their current contracts in order to begin marketing North Carolina's crop.

For more information on this project contact Paul Skillicorn, executive director of Carolina Kenaf Farmers Foundation at (252) 747-5157.

Pat Brinkley named outstanding rural leader for 2001

Though she's the epitome of the kind of rural leadership championed at the Rural Center, Pat Brinkley says she was taken aback to be named the 2001 Outstanding Rural Leadership Award recipient. Brinkley received the award on the eve of the Rural Partners Forum in November, through the Rural Center and the Rural Economic Development Association (REDO).

The award, now in its fifth year, is given annually to someone whose work on behalf of rural North Carolinians inspires others to make a difference in their community.

Brinkley has been making a difference for rural North Carolina for over 25 years; the last 15 years as president of the Western North Carolina Community Development Association. The private, non-profit group serves 20 counties, sponsoring agricultural promotion, various community



Pat Brinkley receives Outstanding Rural Leader Award from Rural Center President Billy Ray Hall

development efforts and The Journey, a youth scholarship and mentoring program dear to Brinkley's heart.

"It is such a tremendous honor for me to work with rural North Carolina," Brinkley said of her recognition. "Especially my work with The Journey. My heart has always been with young people. I came into this wanting to make a difference in their lives."

The program helps teens understand their educational options, assists them with finding grants and scholarships and offers guidance in making future career choices.

A resident of Asheville, Brinkley was among the first to graduate from the Rural Center's Economic Development Institute in 1989. She went on to serve two years as president of REDO, the program's alumni association, and has served on the Rural Center's board of directors for 10 years.

The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center is a private, non-profit corporation whose mission is to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. The center is governed by a 50-member board of directors. Officers are Kelly S. King, chair; Valeria Lee, 1st vice chair; Bill Veeder, 2nd vice chair; Sandra Gambill, secretary; Edmund Aycock, treasurer; Billy Ray Hall, president. Editorial staff: Elaine Matthews, editor; Michelle Taylor, writer; Steve Gaj, design; Megan Miller, production manager. Inquiries should be directed to: Editor, 4021 Carya Drive, Raleigh, NC 27610; Tel. (919) 250-4314. *RURAL ROUTES* is a quarterly publication with a circulation of 3,500. All rights reserved.

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