INTRODUCTION

The primary outreach arm for West Virginia State University in regards to building economically vibrant communities is West Virginia State University Extension’s Office of Community and Economic Development (CED). With a staff of four agents and one extension specialist, CED is currently delivering a broad spectrum of community and economic development programs throughout fourteen counties in central and southern West Virginia.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rural Business Services (RBS)

This program was initiated with a $136,000 grant from the USDA office of Rural Business Cooperative Services. The program serves all 11 counties of Workforce Investment Region 1 in southeastern West Virginia. A program coordinator is housed by the Summers County Commission in Hinton, approximately the geographic center of the region. A continuation grant was written and notification was received that the USDA will continue support of this program.

Working in partnership with the USDA’s state program for Rural Business Services, and a host of other state and private partners like the Small Business Development Center, this program has successfully provided support for a variety of rural small business development initiatives. With the assistance of our partners, we have identified several key directions for this program, which include: low-cost training, which is being co-sponsored frequently with the state and local SBDC; regional facilitation of collaborative economic development activities; community festival development; specialty food promotion and tourism-related small business development.

Notable accomplishments for this program include the sponsorship of a regional economic development project focusing on the utilization of technology attended by more than 150 community leaders from southern West Virginia; the sponsorship of a state-wide conference for the Specialty Foods cooperative that provided individualized business development assistance for 50 small businesses; and a multi-county training on customer service to work in conjunction with the development of a tourism opportunity in the area.

Technology Access Utilization

Much effort has been successfully spent in developing collaboration with the Nick J. Rahall Center for Economic Development housed at WVSOM, Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation, 4-C EDA, the Rahall Rural Transportation Institute
located at Marshall University and Workforce Investment, Region 1 for the purpose of enhancing technology utilization in southern West Virginia. As a result of this yearlong effort, a specific program is being developed to provide e-commerce development assistance as well as provide an impetus for broadband access. Utilizing RBS funds, the core group of partners sponsored a regional development conference on the subject attended by approximately 100 southern West Virginia community leaders and Congressman Rahall.

RBS funds have already been utilized for the development of a regional website, [www.hightechcorridors.com](http://www.hightechcorridors.com) that should go “live” in early 2005. The website will present front-door access to regional development information with links to major partners in community and economic development work in the region.

**Microenterprise Development (MED)**

An extensive process of expanding previous efforts with small businesses education to provide one-on-one business development assistance has been undertaken. The new program expands and formalizes the delivery of a comprehensive microenterprise development program with a primary focus on minority and low to moderate-income business development.

A grant was written and submitted to the HUD program for Historically Black College and University initiatives. With the program, a systematic program of small / micro-business development will be initiated in the spring / summer of 2005. The first phase of this project involves purchasing a site for the program. A tentative site has been selected on the west-side of Charleston that is adjacent to a very low-income neighborhood that is predominately African American. The building and the first three years of operational costs is being borne by a $550,000 grant we just received from HUD.

The program will feature a comprehensive micro (less than 5 employee) development program. Students from an advanced internship program with the WVSU School of Business are working to develop the marketing plan and a training curriculum. A business incubator will also be housed in the site, where low cost rent, phone and Internet access, as well as administrative support, will be available.

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**Community Outreach Centers**

WVSU Extension presently oversees or provides support for fourteen community learning sites within Kanawha County that offer an array of technology literacy and life skills development programs. Four of the sites are located in community or faith-based sites, whereby WVSU, through a grant from the HEPC, installed computers at each of the locations. WVSUE also supports the sites with programmatic delivery including basic computer skills classes and literacy.
Ten of the sites are located in Charleston Housing developments, which are presently funded programmatically by the Neighborhood Networks grant program of HUD. Through Charleston Housing, WVSU extension manages a $250,000 program. The present grant is expiring and a renewal grant that would allow for the continuation of the program over the next 3 years was developed and is pending review.

**Downtown Revitalization**

In partnership with 4-C Economic Development Authority and Fayette County Commission, WVSU Extension has hired a full-time Extension Agent for Community Development to be housed in Fayetteville. Partial funding for this position is being provided by 4-C Economic Development Authority and office space and part-time administrative support is being provided by the Fayette County Commission.

This agent will work in Fayette County with episodic expectation of work in the other three counties under 4-C EDA (Nicholas, Summers, and Raleigh). In determining the role of this agent, partner input identified a need to work on downtown revitalization efforts within the small communities located in Fayette County. As a result, collaboration has been developed with WV Main Street, the state’s division of a national agency specializing in downtown revitalization. With WV Main Street assistance, the agent will work initially with 1-2 pilot communities over the upcoming year to begin the process of revitalizing their downtowns. It is our intent that this pilot, if successful, become a model for placement of other community development agents for downtown revitalization, linked with local county or regional development authorities in others areas of southern West Virginia.

**Workforce Development / Self-Sufficiency Programs**

There is a great need to develop skills necessary to achieve individual economic self-sufficiency in West Virginia. These skills include general educational development such as literacy training and GED preparation, goal setting and leadership development, entrepreneurial training, employment skills including job training, job search, and placement assistance, labor retention skills, and financial literacy.

CED is taking a multi-part approach to this issue. We are presently providing some of the components of the Workforce Development / Self-Sufficiency program through the NN program and the upcoming MED program. The intent is to expand this component, should we receive a pending $350,000 – 3-year grant submitted in partnership with Charleston Housing. If this grant is received, a Self-Sufficiency Program Coordinator will be hired to direct the expansion of this program, with the intent of serving Charleston Housing residents.