

JULY 2010 — *Welcome to the July edition of Initiatives. This issue focuses on rural economic development and the projects that RDI, our partners, and all of you are undertaking to make a difference in the rural Northwest.*



Seven Ways to Boost Rural Economies

by Craig Smith, RDI's Executive Director

No matter where we are on the political spectrum or where we live, we have all been affected by the global recession. When it comes to the cause, some believe it's the banks, others believe it's Wall Street, while some believe the government and individuals are living beyond their means. Regardless of the cause, many feel there is nothing they can do. At Rural Development Initiatives we help rural communities act locally to create economic vitality.



The first step for creating economic vitality is developing a community vision and a plan. You won't have agreement on the best priorities to pursue without completing a planning process. To create a plan, RDI works with community leaders to convene a diverse group of individuals. During the planning process, participants identify and build upon assets; what the community has already rather than trying to bring something in from the outside. Also, it is crucial to diversify your economic development strategies. Don't put your eggs in one basket. And the plan should focus on community development as part of economic vitality—you can't have a healthy economy if your community is lacking in community basics.

RDI has been guiding communities in this process for over 20 years and has worked with over 300 communities. Our experience has led to our belief in and commitment to the following seven best practices for creating economic vitality. After a thoughtful planning process described above, any of these ideas that fit with your community can be implemented in any order and one does not depend on another. However, in our view, the most successful communities have implemented several best practices.

Creating Networks to Support Entrepreneurs and Micro Business Development

Economic development is most successful when you do not put all your eggs in one basket or invest money and hopes in one large employer. Communities are most resilient when there are many small and micro businesses. If one or several do not survive, there are still employment opportunities. These businesses will continue to contribute to the local economy in contrast to one major employer closing. To support entrepreneurs, some communities have entrepreneurial gatherings like pub talks to share resources and ideas. Other communities make sure their existing networks, like the chamber or business association, support all the businesses in town including the micro enterprise and entrepreneurs. Other communities build an Entrepreneurial Development System (EDS) forming a local advisory committee of stakeholders including economic development

districts, councils of governments, and other resource providers to develop programs and support services for entrepreneurs. Several of these practices outlined below can be part of an EDS.

Thinking Local – Supporting Local Businesses First

Our local businesses cannot survive if we do not support them. When you support local businesses first your money stays in the local economy longer. It circulates throughout your community by creating jobs and increasing income. A healthy community has a strong “Think Local First” economy. Several of RDI’s partners in Connecting Oregon for Rural Entrepreneurship (CORE) Program have implemented successful “Think Local First” programs like Buy Local Lincoln County and Think Local Umpqua. RDI can connect you to these resources.

Retaining and Growing Local Businesses

It is always easier and more cost effective to retain a business already in your community rather than recruiting a new business from outside. Utilizing an existing organization like a chamber, business association or starting a Business Assistance Team (BAT) is a good way to retain or expand local businesses and the best resource for creating local jobs. A business retention and expansion program or a BAT utilizes local volunteers to connect businesses to resources that can help with planning, marketing, financing, and other needs required for entrepreneurial success. RDI can connect you to resources for small businesses and help your community develop a Business Assistance Team.

Helping Start New Businesses in Your Community

Every community has people with great ideas but they often lack the resources and training to get a business started. Connecting these individuals to resources or programs is a great way to grow your local economy by helping entrepreneurs start home-based businesses. They will sell products or crafts and provide services that create jobs and support the local economy. RDI offers a program called Steps to Success – Starting a Business @ Home. This is an asset-based entrepreneurial development program that assists home-based businesses in rural communities. Offered in Spanish and English, we provide 30 hours of training, networking, and access to statewide support systems.

Implementing a Downtown Revitalization Program

A healthy and vibrant downtown boosts the economic health and quality of life in a community. Specifically, a healthy downtown creates jobs, incubates small businesses, reduces sprawl, retains a community’s heritage, and is a symbol of community pride and history. There are many approaches to Downtown Revitalization, including the Main

Street Approach which was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and focuses on four areas: organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring.

Most rural Northwest communities expanded from a historic, small downtown core. In many towns, Main Street is still the heart and soul of the community. Many chambers of commerce, cities, and community development corporations have a downtown revitalization program. If your community does not offer one, RDI can help get you started through planning and organization.

Organizing Farmers Markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A farmers market provides residents with fresh local products as opposed to many of the products offered at traditional supermarkets. Supporting local farmers ensures you know what you are buying and where it comes from and keeps money in your community (Think Local First). Farmers markets help us focus on seasonal eating rather than buying fresh blueberries in December from somewhere in South America. This helps conserve fossil fuels and reduce carbon emissions. Many farmers markets have become large community events, where families come out, enjoy food from local vendors, and listen to live entertainment which also helps build social capital.

Another way to get products directly from your local farmers is through CSA. Over the last 20 years, CSA has become a popular way for consumers to buy local, fresh seasonal food. Through a CSA, a farmer typically offers a certain number of "shares" to the public. Interested consumers purchase a share (aka a "membership" or a "subscription") and in return receive a box (bag, basket) of seasonal produce delivered each week throughout the farming season. If you have a farmers market or CSA in your community, please support it. If not, there are many resources available to start one.

Developing Visitor Amenities – Rural Tourism and GeoTourism

The travel industry is a significant contributor to rural communities throughout Oregon. Based on data from Travel Oregon and research by Dean Runyan and Associates, tourism employs the most number of people and ranks fourth for the level of earnings. It brings in twice as much income in our state's rural areas as compared with urban areas. Many of the tourism businesses in Oregon are sole-proprietors, which builds a strong case that the tourism industry supports entrepreneurs.

Geotourism sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Rural tourism promotes responsible travel by providing visitor services and attractions that generate local revenue while preserving cultural heritage and the natural amenities. RDI can help your community discover tourism assets and develop a plan.

Remember, economic vitality takes time. If you implement one or all of these best practices, you most likely won't see results overnight. Many are a shift in our cultural thinking, and it takes time and commitment from community leaders, citizens, volunteers, and businesses to see many of these best practices take hold and become part of the community fabric. But don't worry, you are not alone. RDI is here to assist you in your efforts, as are many other organizations and agencies. If you are interested in how RDI can help your community create economic vitality, contact Laurel MacMillan, phone: 503-803-8260 or email: lmacmillan@rdiinc.org. [Learn more](#) about small business and community economic development resources on RIPPLE.



Strategic Planning: What a Trip!

Banks and Sweet Home, Oregon are two cities who have taken the journey with the help of RDI.

Some people are planners. When they get ready to go on a vacation they read all the guidebooks, make lists of sights they need to see, and have a detailed itinerary for the entire trip.

Other people like things a little looser—to be more spontaneous and not so rigid. Take it as it comes and go with the flow!

Both ways have their merits and both ways work for certain kinds of people.

But when it comes to the future and success of communities, having a plan is a necessity.

It's like going on a road trip. You could just jump in the car and start driving—you might see some really interesting sights and end up somewhere great. You also might end up getting lost. Similarly, the road to community vitality can often be long and winding, and include many potholes and detours as the communities of Banks and Sweet Home have discovered over the last fifteen to twenty years. But in the end, having a Strategic Plan—that road map and a set of directions to help them find their way has made all the difference. So much so, that both towns have recently been recognized by the local media repeatedly for their down-home triumphs.

RDI and the community of Banks began what was to become a long and beneficial road trip almost 15 years ago. It began with a strategic planning process and has continued through the years as a prime example of RDI's mission at work--building leadership networks and rural communities.

In Banks,

- The installation of a “Welcome to Banks” sign on the state highway just outside of town.
- A “Banks Business Guide”
- The Banks “Business Assistance Team” of local community members including the City, Chamber, and small businesses that have reached out to the local businesses of Banks to

assess their needs and connect them to resources like the Small Business Development Center, which has helped create and retain new jobs.

- Twenty-five colorful pennants honoring life in the community of Banks that are now hanging proudly along Main Street.
- Hwy 47 Network that lead to stronger businesses in five neighboring communities along Hwy 47 (Forest Grove, Vernonia, Rainier, Clatskanie and Banks).
- The Banks Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3) that has help build capacity within the community by acting as an umbrella for other community groups for which they can fundraise.
- A dramatic change in the Bank's community where their citizen's depth of knowledge and understanding of what is happening in their community has increased.

On a similar journey, in the early 1990's, RDI worked with the Sweet Home community helping develop a strategic response to the loss of hundreds of timber jobs. That response included a community assessment and a vision statement for the Sweet Home Economic Development Group.

In Sweet Home,

- The main street was spruced up, literally! Thanks to a beautification committee, ugly lane divider strips on Highway 20 in downtown Sweet Home have been turned into garden-like sites with aesthetically pleasing street lamps. Landscaped areas and signs now greet visitors at community entrances.
- Sidewalks have been added to portions of town, and the community has made significant improvements to its water and sewer systems, including construction of a \$12 million water treatment plant.
- A Boys and Girls Club, Senior Center and Community Center has joined the community that are well-used, and new police and fire stations, and renovated its high school and elementary schools have followed suit.
- A new marina community has been established: new townhouses selling for \$500,000 to nearly \$1 million have been constructed at Foster Reservoir, where there is a 49-slip marina with plans to double in size. There's also an RV park with plans for a three-story lodge and commercial center.
- The Oregon Jamboree has grown into one of the premiere country music events in the Northwest and generates annual profits of more than \$300,000, with 10 percent donated to the community foundation.
- Volunteerism remains high despite Sweet Home's relatively large commuter base.



2009 volunteers from the Oregon Jamboree held annually in Sweet Home, Oregon. Photo courtesy of Kyle Krenik, Krenik Media and Oregon Jamboree

Both communities have also participated in the RDI facilitated, Ford Institute Leadership Program (FILP) training (a five year program which includes three years of Leadership Development Classes; an Effective Organizations training and a Community Collaborations training), sponsored by The Ford Family Foundation.

Both communities have seen clear and positive results that can be directly attributed to their journey with RDI, (RDI learned just as much from them along the way too)! But what led to these successful end results was the willingness of both to take the first step and commit their plans to paper--a road map pointing them in the right direction.

Ray Deeth, the current Chamber of Commerce Administrator in Banks, was part of the team that helped author that original map. "The Strategic Plan really helped kick things off--really got us going," says Deeth.

In Sweet Home, a long list of accomplishments over the last fifteen years reinforces the value of planning and trusting in the process. The community has many significant accomplishments they can be proud of. "We have succeeded because we chipped away at the goals a little at a time," says former mayor Tim McQueary. "We didn't try to make things happen in one big bite. It just would have been too much."



RDI Executive Director Craig Smith recently paid visits to both Banks and Sweet Home to check in on the progress of the communities. This past January, Smith was on hand in Banks at the Banks Fire Hall to celebrate the completion of the latest Leadership class project-- "The Banks Beautification Pennant Project." For their project, the class designed, sewed and installed twenty-five colorful pennants honoring life in the community of Banks. The pennants now hang along Main Street and are a source and display of community pride.

Photo courtesy of Lori Alley, Alleyway Photography

"I was the trainer for the first Ford Institute Leadership class here in Banks, but actually our work with Banks started way before that," said Smith. "Back in 1996 when we completed the Strategic Planning effort, it included ideas about how to make the downtown and Main Street better. The banner idea was something that was in that plan. So it's really amazing to come back and see that it has come to fruition, like so many other things that were in that plan."

Smith also recently spent time with city leaders in Sweet Home viewing some of the progress and successes. "I'm really impressed," Smith said. "Early intervention has made a difference. There has been a long-term commitment. It's truly impressive what Sweet Home has done."

Current Banks City Manager Jim Hough has an interesting perspective on RDI's work in his

community and especially the FILP training. "It's really helped build capacity in our community," says Hough. "I've seen a real expansion of individual horizons--their eyes are opened and I think they become better citizens. I've seen a dramatic change in our citizen's depth of knowledge and their understanding of what is happening in their community."

Strategic Planning for a community takes forethought, a willingness to commit to creating a plan and following through with that plan. It takes hard work and the ability to collaborate with members from all parts of the community (talk about your backseat drivers)! Like a tattered map, communities must revisit the plan that has been created again and again and check with all passengers. Long term planning doesn't happen overnight--it takes dedication, trust and a willingness to allow the process to happen. But in the end, as both Banks and Sweet Home have shown, a well planned road trip produces results and is both worth the work and the wait.

If you are ready to work on your community, projects like these reflect RDI's beliefs that rural communities hold the key to their own success, and inclusive decision making generates the best ideas. Our community building services include visioning, strategic planning, facilitation, consensus building, and more. We have facilitated nearly 100 strategic plans and visions for rural communities and regions and have worked with more than 200 community groups. [[Learn more](#)] about our community building services by reading about our projects or contact Heidi Clark Khokhar, phone: 541-968-2542 or email: hkhokhar@rdiinc.org.



Rural Economy Project

OPB partners with RDI and other non-profits to address employment crisis in rural Oregon

At nearly 11 percent, Oregon's unemployment rate is among the highest in the nation, and small towns have been especially hard hit. Across the state, from the Blue Mountains to the Gold Coast, the Rural Economy Project gathers stories designed to inspire sustainable community building to help people and communities thrive. The project showcases successful entrepreneurs, people trying to make ends meet, and communities working to build stable, vital economies in Oregon's rural towns. The project also offers resources and information to help develop entrepreneurial skills and find jobs or start businesses.

As part of the endeavor, OPB is producing several radio programs. (Think Out Loud, OPB's daily radio conversation about news and issues, is airing episodes taped on location in rural communities, and OPB's Kristian Foden-Vencil is reporting a five-part radio series which explores the challenges that rural communities face in this economy.) So far, Think Out Loud has visited communities in Newport, The Dalles, and Cave



Junction with more locations coming soon.

What we are learning is that rural people have the know-how and the drive to set things right, what they lack is the voice, and that is where the Rural Economy Project comes in.

Immediately following Think Out Loud, RDI is facilitating forums where farmers, ranchers, manufacturers, and even master clock makers are continuing the conversation proving that there are signs of life in rural Oregon's economy. These stories, along with resources from project partners and blog posts from project bloggers, Lily Brislen and Bruce Sorte, are being showcased on RDI's RIPPLE website. [[learn more](#)] RIPPLE is an online community of rural voices dedicated to rural life in the Northwest, a place to connect and share resources that support community and economic development in rural areas. Additional news stories and commentary can be found on Oregon Public Broadcasting's Rural Economy Project web page. [[learn more](#)]

We hope you will join the conversation. The next Think Out Loud and RDI Forum will be held in Eastern Oregon the week of July 19-23, date and location to be determined soon. Check back for exact date and location!

RDI has worked in more than 300 rural communities in the Northwest, and through this we have access to the Northwest's most important asset: people. We facilitate networking formally through events, online through our RIPPLE website, and informally every chance we get, so that the knowledge, skills, and experiences of the people we work with can be passed between communities that may lie far apart. If you are working on a project in the rural Northwest, RDI is here to help you find the right people. To find out more about how RDI actively works to bring you together to share information, contact Gary Stewart, phone: 503-554-1608, email: gstewart@rdiinc.org or visit our webpage. [[learn more](#)]



Connecting Oregon to Jobs Through (CORE) Entrepreneurship Program

RDI supports entrepreneurship across rural Oregon.

A paisley isn't just a country décor item for Keith and Patty Barnhart, it is where they live and operate their burgeoning resort business, Willow Springs Guest Ranch. Yes, we said resort business...South of Paisley, Oregon...population 247! And what a business it is! Despite the recession, the ranch is experiencing continual booking as far out as a year in advance due in part to a solar expansion project spurred by RDI's Connecting Oregon for Rural Entrepreneurship (CORE) project. Keith and Patty are just two of the more than 2,500 entrepreneurs helped by the program. From the establishment of a student-run kayak rental business in Lincoln County, to the creation of a business incubator in Warm Springs, CORE acts as a keystone to RDI's economic vitality strategy aimed at supporting small local business.



Photo courtesy of Willow Springs Guest Ranch

CORE was created four years ago when RDI was chosen as one of six organizations throughout the nation to receive a \$2,000,000 W.K. Kellogg Foundation grant award to promote and support entrepreneurship. When that grant ended a couple of years later, the momentum continued. CORE's work continued to be funded through the USDA, Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD), and Meyer Memorial Trust.

Because of CORE:

- More than 300 Oregon jobs in rural places have been created or retained.
- Thousands of adult and youth entrepreneurs have been engaged in trainings, events and other networking opportunities.
Nearly 600 business owners in Rural Oregon have received technical assistance.
- 50 entrepreneurs started businesses out of their homes.

RDI brought together 20 organizations that support entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in rural Oregon to form the CORE collaborative. The CORE collaborative supports entrepreneurship in the following ways:

- Lead organizations in seven regions (Target Areas) provide direct support to existing and new entrepreneurs through an Entrepreneurship Development System (EDS). They provide technical assistance, education to youth and adults, help entrepreneurs to access capital, and create networking and peer learning opportunities for entrepreneurs in their regions.
- The CORE collaborative works to fill gaps in the services each regional lead provides.
- Sustainable local investments are used to increase the volume and success rate of local entrepreneurs.
- Advocacy for entrepreneur-friendly policies and programs are undertaken by CORE.
- Success and reach is evaluated by each regional EDS to establish best practices for supporting entrepreneurs.

Today, the CORE project is nearing completion, but success stories continue to accumulate. Through the countless collaborative efforts between the seven Target Areas, CORE has been able to bring experts on small business, buying local, marketing, and entrepreneurship to Oregon. New connections outside of the collaborative have been made with statewide partners including Oregon Microenterprise Network, eDev, Young Entrepreneur's Business Week, Oregon Entrepreneurs Network, ONABEN, and many, many more. At the final retreat in June, CORE partners and stakeholders agreed that they will continue to turn to each other for best

practices, innovative ideas and collaboration efforts.

If you are interested in learning more about CORE and how cultivating entrepreneurship can be a viable economic development strategy with the outcome of creating new businesses, new jobs, and increased tax revenue for your local economy, RDI can help! Contact Laurel MacMillan, phone: 503-803-8260 or email: lmacmillan@rdiinc.org. To read about high school student and young entrepreneur, Jordan Keck, a CORE success story, visit RIPPLE. [\[learn more\]](#)



And the Winner Is...!

Central Cascades Geotourism Mapguide wins Travel Lane County Award.

Travel Lane County held its 2010 Visitor Industry Celebration on Tuesday, June 15. Businesses, organizations, and individuals throughout Lane County were honored for their dedication and outstanding contributions to Lane County's visitor industry.

The National Geographic Central Cascades Geotourism MapGuide Project won the Eugene, Cascades and Coast Partnership Award. The project resulted in the creation of a map and website featuring dozens of Lane County landmarks, attractions and other points of interest. RDI and its partners were involved in creating the Map Guide — a paper and interactive web-based map that promotes natural and cultural tourism as well as encourages a sense of pride in local communities. The Oregon/Washington bi-state effort involved the following partners: Travel Oregon, Washington State Tourism, Sustainable Travel International, Sustainable Northwest, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.



RDI reached out to hear rural voices with a dynamic and interactive process for the project via 25 Community Forums throughout the region. Over half of these communities had populations of less than 5,000 people, reflecting a deliberate effort to bring the project to rural communities in the Central Cascade region. The forums guided participants through an educational process which allowed them to nominate sites for the map and the website.

RDI helps rural places develop economic development and rural tourism plans like this one that reflect the needs and values of their community. [\[Learn more\]](#) about how we support entrepreneurship and community-minded tourism in the rural Northwest by reading about some of our most recent projects, or contacting RDI staff Laurel MacMillan, phone: 503-803-8260 or email: lmacmillan@rdiinc.org.

RDI's RIPPLE Web Site Wins a Webvisionary Award



We never knew we were webvisionaries! RIPPLE, RDI's community web site, has won the 2010 Webvisionary Award in the Informational/Educational category. RIPPLE is an online community of rural voices dedicated to rural life in the Northwest, a place to connect around rural issues and share resources that support community and economic development in rural areas.

The awards are part of the annual WebVisions Conference, a nationally-recognized conference that explores the future of Web design, technology, user experience, and business strategy. The awards honor the most visionary, daring, and amazing talent on the web.

[\[Learn more\]](#) about the RIPPLE site and become a fan on [Facebook](#). The stories about rural life will give you a sense of some of the great things happening in rural communities and the RDI world!



Check Out RDI's New Web Site and Become a Facebook Fan!

Want to learn more about what we do at RDI? Come and visit us online at RDI's new website: www.rdiinc.org. Our new website will help you stay up to date on RDI and what's happening in the rural Northwest. You can connect with RDI staff, learn more about the services we offer, and find out about some of our favorite projects. You can also become a fan on [Facebook](#), where you will receive exciting updates on the people and places RDI visits!