

# Initiatives: RDI Newsletter

**OCTOBER 2010** – *Welcome to the October edition of Initiatives. This issue focuses on the projects that RDI, our partners, and all of you are undertaking to make a difference in your communities and throughout the rural Northwest.*



## RDI – 100 Best Nonprofit Ranking Unveiled

*by Craig Smith, RDI's Executive Director*

RDI made the list this year, deemed one of the 100 Best Nonprofits to Work For in Oregon! This honor results as part of a survey process conducted by Oregon Business Magazine. Through the survey, our employees took the opportunity to voice their opinions about a wide variety of workplace aspects. Companies are ranked based on survey scores, and many nonprofits and almost 5,000 employees from around the state participated in the survey this year. RDI ranked 28th in the medium sized nonprofits category (25–75 employees) and we think being 28th is great!



100 Best Awards Dinner and Celebration on September 29 where the top 100 rankings were revealed.  
Doris Penwell, RDI Board Member; Craig Smith; Greg Ellis, RDI Board Member

### RDI—An Organization by Mutual Design



RDI entered the survey in 2009, but did not make the top 100 initially. We were disappointed but took this opportunity to learn where we could improve the organization. By participating in the survey, we received anonymous feedback from our staff regarding workplace satisfaction such as benefits, management, trust, work environment, and career development. We worked together as a whole staff, dedicating ourselves as an organization to prioritizing feedback and identifying improvements we wanted to make. We learned that our program delivery staff was unclear about career advancement opportunities, salary ranges, and how our benefits and salaries compared to other nonprofits, and we needed to better recognize exemplary work.

Over the next several months we instituted some changes. We developed a new job level, program manager that allowed for more career advancement. We shared the salary ranges and job descriptions for all positions in the organization. We received salary and benefit data from a comprehensive comprehensive survey of nonprofits in Oregon so staff could see how we compared to other nonprofits. And we instituted an over the top cash award to recognize exemplary efforts and we have awarded more

than ten so far this year. These and other changes have made a measurable difference within our organization.

We are grateful to the Nonprofit Association of Oregon (NAO), Oregon Business Magazine and Davis, Hibbitts and Midghall who developed the survey. Most of all we are thankful to all of our staff who help RDI become a better a place to work every day and to the rural communities we serve, who inspire us to work harder and smarter. We encourage all nonprofits that have ten or more employees to participate next year. It is not about winning or losing or where you are ranked, but rather learning about what you are doing right and where you can get better. As our nonprofits improve, so will Oregon.



## Walla Walla Neighborhoods Show Commitment to Community

A few years ago, RDI told the story of a burgeoning town where residents were shining the light on neglected neighborhoods. Indeed, Walla Walla, Washington, has been riding the rising wave of national and international acclaim brought on by the success of its wine industry, historic preservation efforts, downtown revitalization, and quality of living. Distinctions include Sunset magazine's 2005 Wine Destination of the Year and 2002 Best Main Street awards, and Money magazine's 2006 Best Places to Retire. But just off the main street, within neighborhoods once beleaguered by crime, vandalism and civic neglect, a cadre of committed residents are seeing the result of strengthening Walla Walla at its core.



Walla Walla's makeover of spirit and community is present in everything from reclaimed neighborhoods to a children's art wall.

Leading the vanguard are individuals trained through the RDI-delivered Sherwood Trust Community Leadership Program (STCLP), whose efforts continue to yield remarkable transformations within Walla Walla's underserved neighborhoods. The Sherwood Trust is a foundation dedicated to serving the Walla Walla Valley as a catalyst to build the communities' capacity and will to achieve in appreciation of Donald and Virginia Sherwood. "Our primary goal is to convince neighborhoods they need to take responsibility from the ground up," stresses Sherwood Trust president Jock Edwards. Edwards' earlier participation in the RDI-delivered, Ford Institute Leadership Program in Milton-Freewater led to the trust's request to offer an adaptation of that training to members of Commitment to Community (C2C) in Walla Walla. C2C is funded through community stakeholders, and includes partnerships with city, county, and local financial and community institutions like The Sherwood Trust. If you visit Walla Walla today, you will witness a miraculous makeover of spirit and community present in everything from reclaimed neighborhoods to a children's art

wall, massive park renovations and a state-of-the-art community center.

### **The Civic Renaissance Continues**

Despite Walla Walla's bold reputation with wine and downtown renovation, it is a city of 30,000 people with its share of crime, drug and gang violence problems. C2C has been helping tackle crime and neglect, one neighborhood at a time. One of the more recent neighborhoods of focus can be found at the intersection of Edith and Carrie.

C2C's Neighborhood Organizers began walking the Edith and Carrie streets, to build a sense of trust. Eventually a group of concerned citizens became involved; The Blue Mountain Action Council, a nonprofit in southeast Washington, received a grant and purchased 11 lots in the neighborhood. A plan was developed and on three contiguous lots the initial phase of a park was built that included an amphitheater and stage, a covered shelter area, a community garden, a mural, and an artistic gateway. Later, a basketball court was added. This was all done by local residents. "It has changed the fabric of the neighborhood," says Edwards.



Local Walla Walla residents work to change the fabric of their neighborhood.

RDI Executive Director Craig Smith recently returned from a visit to the community of Walla Walla where he confirmed that those achievements were only the beginning. Smith was able to observe first-hand the results of RDI's ongoing working partnership with the Sherwood Trust, including what can happen after Community Leadership Training programs are delivered and when community members are inspired, become engaged, and take ownership of their neighborhoods to create real dynamic change. "This is what we hoped would happen—community leaders being empowered to tackle larger and more complex issues—leaders shaping their communities and becoming more engaged in the process. This really validates the importance of community advocates like The Sherwood Trust and underlines why we do what we do at RDI."

### **Community Organizers Walk the Beat**

C2C is taking action in what are considered some of Walla Walla's toughest neighborhoods. They have developed what Edwards called a "Strategic Cycle" involving neighborhood organizers who spend time walking neighborhoods developing relationships and building trust with residents; gathering interested people and neighborhood leaders together to discuss problems and priorities; encouraging the community to choose a priority and develop a project that will address that priority; implementing the project; and then celebrating their success.

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"Community Organizers act as facilitators and conveners," says Edwards about the C2C program. "They are a resource but they don't lead the project. The residents of the neighborhood are the leaders." RDI's contribution to this process has included delivering bilingual leadership training classes in Spanish and English to neighborhoods with Latino populations where the C2C process is taking place.

"Through RDI we were able to find facilitators who were well trained both bi-lingually and bi-culturally," says C2C's manager Nancy Carter. "They were able to not only deliver the training to all our participants, but really develop relationships as well." According to Carter, RDI facilitators work with local emerging leaders to help develop an ongoing action plan for their neighborhoods.

Joining in the neighborhood renaissance has been the Washington-based,



The fruits of community work in Walla Walla, Washington.

Pomegranate Center and Milenko Matenovic. Milenko facilitates the conception and construction of open-air gathering places, involving community members in all phases of these projects, from generation of initial concept, through construction and stewardship.

Milenko was invited back this fall for a second project—a plaza concept for a gathering place for families in the mostly Latino neighborhood called Washington Park. This includes an outdoor stage, a dance floor, picnic shelter and

walking path, explained Carter. "The people in this neighborhood indicated that they love music and they love to dance, so that's what we've been doing while developing this project—singing and dancing and celebrating."

"RDI has been proud to join in the celebration in Walla Walla and is continually inspired by communities like Walla Walla's commitment to community," recounts Smith.

RDI has learned from communities like Walla Walla that effective, diverse, and collaborative leadership is an essential component of vital rural communities. We also believe that leadership can be an intentional and learned skill. RDI has delivered our flagship Ford Institute Leadership Program in more than 300 communities. We also offer leadership services tailored to fit the needs and culture of specific groups such as youth, Tribal, and Latino. You can learn more about RDI's leadership development work and philosophy by reading about some of our current projects [\[click here\]](#) or by

contacting Gary Stewart, email: [gstewart@rdiinc.org](mailto:gstewart@rdiinc.org) or phone: 503-554-1608. Don't miss out on an opportunity to start a civic renaissance in your community!



## RDI: OLAA's Amigo

“One United Voice – Una Voz Unida” was the theme for the historic two day inaugural Summit on October 17 and 18 in Salem, Oregon. Organized by the Oregon Latino Agenda for Action (OLAA), the summit focused on critical issues of concern to the Latino community, Oregon’s fastest growing ethnic community. Latino organizational and community representatives from across the state were invited to ensure regional engagement and to help frame the issues and courses of action.

“Our Latino community in Oregon is at the tipping point with a new, collaborative ethos for presenting a united front for effective strategies for change, and that is why we organized this historic statewide summit,” explains Consuelo Saragoza, MPA, OLAA Co-Chair and spokesperson.



Hector H. Hernandez proudly displays his artwork at the OLAA Summit.

OLAA also partnered with existing organizations and other influential and respected groups devoted to education, public health, and community development to contribute to the content of the Summit. RDI was involved in the planning and organization of the event and was an "Amigo," one of the summit sponsors. At the summit, Adrián G. Castro, Regional Program Coordinator; Nadia Legorreta, Program Support Specialist; and Mayra Arreola, Latino Program Manager, represented RDI, and

Mayra served as facilitator at table discussions. RDI's display table, which presented information about the different Latino programs RDI has to offer, helped establish networking opportunities and new connections.

With one voice, OLAA will be able to articulate the range of Latino perspectives and will harness these ideas for a 'statewide agenda for action' that will meet the overarching needs of the growing number of Latino families in Oregon. RDI will continue to stay involved in future OLAA activities to assist with the issues that arose during the summit, especially those focused on rural areas.

"RDI has a strong understanding within the Latino communities where these needs are being addressed with leadership development in Spanish," commented Adrián G. Castro. RDI's Latino leadership programs are dynamic, informative, and relevant to Latino traditions in rural communities. Each program aims to increase unity among Latinos in the community, and increase Latino leadership in the community at large. For more information regarding RDI's Latino programs, contact Mayra Arreola, email: [marreola@rdiinc.org](mailto:marreola@rdiinc.org) or phone: 503-803-1345.



## Effective Organizations: Help Is on the Way!

How many of us have suffered endless hours spent in tedious, disorganized, unproductive organizational board meetings? Do any of you sit on boards where you're really not sure of your responsibilities, or even question the direction the organization is headed? Are you guilty of leaving the room when the organization's financial report is

handed out in order to hide the fact that you don't have a clue of what it's all about?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions you aren't alone. But help is on the way!

The Effective Organizations component of the Ford Institute Leadership Program is designed to help individuals – just like you – develop the skills necessary for the successful leadership and management of community organizations. Core topics of Effective Organizations (EO) include strategic planning,



Acquiring new skills can be as easy as blowing up balloons.  
Jefferson Cascade EO:  
"One Balloon at a Time"

### KEY FINDINGS

OSU research indicates participants from the Effective Organizations (EO) training reported:

- Increased knowledge in strategic planning
- Increased knowledge in operational management
- Increased knowledge in resource development and management
- Increased confidence to use the skills and tools learned in the training
- Increased access to a greater network of organizations and individuals with which to collaborate

As a result of the EO training, participants also reported that they plan to:

- Become more effective as individuals in their organizations
- Help implement effective organizational strategies, including strategic planning and board management, within their organizations
- Increase the role of their organizations within their communities

organizational leadership, and resource development – both human and financial.

The 20–24 hour training, which comprises the second year’s offering in the five-year Ford Institute Leadership Program’s community commitment, offers you a chance to learn in a fun and stimulating interactive environment with other individuals in your community. Although the training is specifically focused on directors, board members, staff and volunteers who work with nonprofit and service organizations, it’s also proven helpful to staff of local governments, service districts, and institutions such as schools and clinics. Follow-up technical assistance to participating organizations is provided as part of the program as well.

Over 1,600 individuals from 52 hub communities have already participated in the Effective Organizations program since its first offering in the fall of 2004. Effective Organizations is sponsored by The Ford Family Foundation and is delivered by RDI, Nonprofit Association of Oregon (NAO), and Human Systems. Recent research performed by Oregon State University on the effectiveness of the Ford Institute Leadership Program shows that a significant majority of surveyed participants not only gained knowledge from the EO trainings, but also plan to implement the skills they learned in their organizations. Participants were found to be optimistic that the training will, indeed, help their organizations become stronger in the long run!

#### Effective Organizations Coming to a Community Near You!



Upcoming "EO" communities for Fall 2010 through Spring 2011  
For more information about Effective Organizations,  
contact RDI at 541.684.9077

*\*delivered by RDI*

If you think Effective Organizations training might be the answer you are looking for, contact Donna Chickering at RDI, email: [dchickering@rdiinc.org](mailto:dchickering@rdiinc.org) or phone: 541-441-6680. There are classes planned in several communities over the next few

months, but you can also arrange to have a training delivered specifically for your organization. The services that small nonprofits and government agencies provide are invaluable to creating healthy rural communities. Through specialized programs and technical assistance, RDI helps organizations effectively plan, communicate, and generate energy and concrete action for a better future. RDI would love to work with you!

## Economic Vitality Summits: An Infusion of Knowledge to Benefit Local Economies

Buy Local! Keep and Cultivate New Businesses! Support the Entrepreneurs! These are just a few of the sentiments we hear expressed in rural towns throughout the region. In order to help support and extend these concepts, Ford Institute Leadership Program graduates and other interested community leaders joined The Ford Family Foundation and RDI staff in learning more about economic vitality strategies from national experts. The Summits took place in Pendleton and Klamath Falls and were sponsored by The Ford Family Foundation and organized by Rural Development Initiatives (RDI).

Sessions included Starting or Expanding a Buy Local Campaign, presented by Jeff Milchen, American Independent Business Alliance; Cultivating an Entrepreneurial Community, presented by Maury Forman, Washington State Department of Commerce; and Business Retention and Cultivation: Forming a Community Vitality Action Team in Your Community, presented by Laurel MacMillan, Rural Development Initiatives.

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Forum participants ranged in experience levels, from working 25 years in economic development to brand new to the economic vitality world. The economic vitality forums are intended to



Roughly 140 people attended two Economic Vitality Forums organized by The Ford Institute for Community Building and Rural Development Initiatives. The forums were held on September 30 and October 1 in Eastern and Southern Oregon.

introduce new economic development strategies on how to increase rural vitality in communities and to create a regional network for mentoring, partnerships and shared resources for community members to connect with people from other communities. Watch for a Forum coming to your community in 2011!

RDI believes vital economies are essential to the future of rural communities, and entrepreneurs are the back bone of rural economies. That's why RDI's economic vitality programs focus on helping small businesses thrive through networking, skill building, and planning. In addition to supporting entrepreneurship, we help communities develop economic development and rural tourism plans that reflect the needs and values of their community. To learn more, please contact Laurel MacMillan, email: [lmacmillan@rdiinc.org](mailto:lmacmillan@rdiinc.org) or phone: 503-803-8260.



## Welcome New RDI Staff!



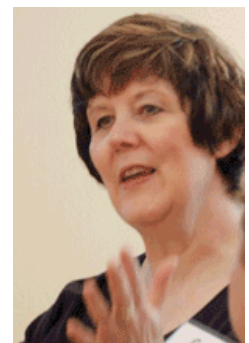
Shawn Morford  
Regional Program  
Coordinator

RDI welcomes Shawn Morford, our newest Regional Program Coordinator. Having a small-town Midwest childhood that was influenced by civically committed parents and neighborhood wetlands that welcomed her to explore and build forts, she has an affinity for community and for the outdoors.

Shawn will train with the Ford Institute Leadership Program as well as explore ways to assist communities in establishing and measuring social and economic indicators and collect community-based data, especially related to conservation and natural resources. Shawn can be contacted by email: [smorford@rdiinc.org](mailto:smorford@rdiinc.org) or phone: 503-989-4041.

Cec Koontz joined RDI in September as a Regional Program Coordinator although she first met RDI through her participation in the Ford Institute Leadership Program. A self-proclaimed valley girl (Willamette Valley!), Cec enjoys working with the proud, independent, creative, amazing people that make Oregon the strong beautiful state it is.

Cec will be training with the Ford Institute leadership Program in addition to assisting communities to promote and strengthen their leaders, economies, governments, and organizations. Cec can be contacted at email: [ckoontz@rdiinc.org](mailto:ckoontz@rdiinc.org) or phone: 503-551-6275.



Cec Koontz  
Regional Program  
Coordinator