



# 2017 Annual Report

**Partners for Rural America is the national organization of State Rural Development Councils *working together to improve the quality of life in rural America.***



Top left: Council of Rural Virginia Ex. Director Christy Morton with Governor McAuliffe. Center: Partners for Rural Washington Board Chair Kim Herman with Governor Inslee. Top right: Rural Maryland Council Charlotte Davis with Board Chair Josh Hastings and Governor Hogan. Bottom: Vermont Council on Rural Development Ex. Director Paul Costello (by the flag) with Governor Scott at the podium.

## Guiding principles for State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) from the National Farm Bill

- ▶ That SRDCs shall include representation from all agencies, organizations and individuals who are dedicated to enhancing economic and social opportunities for rural citizens.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall seek the support and participation of the governors of the states in which the SRDC operates.
- ▶ That participation in SRDC decisions and operations shall be open to all who wish to participate.
- ▶ The SRDCs shall represent the diversity of states' rural populations and geography.
- ▶ That all that participate in SRDCs shall have a voice in their decision and that the SRDCs shall be free from control of any single individual, organization, agency, sector, political party or interest group.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall provide open, neutral environments where all participants' voices can be heard and where major decisions are reached, whenever possible, through consensus.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall receive financial and other support from diverse sources.
- ▶ That SRDCs shall retain an executive director to manage the operation of the SRDC if financially able to do so, and if not, the SRDC shall be operated by a working board of directors.
- ▶ That all SRDCs shall participate in the nationwide network of SRDCs known as Partners for Rural America.

# State Council Highlights



Arizona

## Overview of Recent Accomplishments

Arizona Rural Development Council (AZRDC) is working to strengthen Arizona's economy in multiple ways. AZRDC helps rural businesses become more competitive in order to reduce economic leakage from their communities by providing business owners tools and resources including new technology training, marketing opportunities, and strategies for business development. Additionally, AZRDC works to drive new dollars to rural places through increasing in-state tourism by leveraging arts and culture, Main Streets, and agri-tourism. Finally, AZRDC works to empower rural Arizonans to improve their access to healthy foods which has health and economic benefits for all residents.

The Arizona Rural Development Council ([www.azrdc.org](http://www.azrdc.org)) and a team of 10 staff with 4 statewide offices. Additionally, AZRDC has a statewide blog, which gets read 13,000 times per month, an email list of 4,078 subscribers and LFA has over 230,000 social media followers. These resources are available for our rural businesses and community partners to promote and educate all Arizonans about all that rural Arizona has to offer.

The Arizona Rural Development Council works to create new models of community and economic development that tie together small businesses, historic downtown main streets, tourism strategies, and community planning. The Rural Advisory Board consists of representatives from all 15 counties that work to develop quality topics and a diverse array of speakers for the Rural Policy Forum each year.

## Rural Policy Forum: Driving Innovation in Rural Arizona

The annual Arizona Rural Policy Forum offers a venue for connecting rural economic development professionals, nonprofits, community leaders, business owners, government officials and other rural stakeholders who are interested in sustaining rural communities. This year's 11th Annual Arizona Rural Policy Forum convened 300 representatives from every Arizona county to participate in two and a half days of workshops, speakers, breakout sessions, tours and more. Over 50 speakers from Arizona and 3 national leaders in rural economic development joined us in Pinetop to share successes and best practices.

## Science Happens Here: Bringing STEM education to communities in new ways

AZRDC launched Science Happens Here ([www.sciencehappenshereaz.com](http://www.sciencehappenshereaz.com)), a science trading card game aimed at students in 4-6<sup>th</sup> grades. Students collect cards with everyday science on them at local businesses and conduct experiment to win prizes. The café has the card with the science of caffeine, and the bakery has the science of yeast, etc. Over 200 students in one small town have played so far, and plans for expansion are underway.

## Healthy Food Systems: Fueling Rural Arizona

Food is at the center of our daily lives, and agriculture and food production are major driving forces in the state's economy. Supporting Arizona food entrepreneurs, farmers, ranchers, and others in the local food industry is an important part of our mission in fostering food-based community economic development and expanding access to affordable, fresh and local foods in both urban and rural areas. Our portfolio of foods initiatives demonstrates the connection between food, health, community and the environment, as well as fosters new opportunities for Arizona farmers, ranchers and food artisans.

- **Good Food Finder AZ:** In 2015, the Local First Arizona Foundation launched an improved version of Good Food Finder AZ. Now featuring over 1200 individual listings of where to find good food, Good Food Finder is Arizona's most comprehensive online directory of local food.
- **Food & Farm Finance Forum:** This year's Food & Farm Finance Forum was held in the Southern Arizona region, with over 130 farmers and producers and economic development entities, local food system advocates, and students convened for two days to change the way our desert state feeds itself. This year's focus was on marketing and outreach, food aggregation and distribution, and access to capital and business development with an overall emphasis on building food hubs and collaboration.
- **Farmer+Chef Connection:** Arizona Farmer+Chef Connection is an annual event with the mission of building wholesale business relationships between food producers and buyers. The Farmer+Chef Connection has grown from being an intimate event to one that reached over 400 attendees of all kinds this year. Just over 50% of attendees were represented by buyers looking to set up direct wholesale purchase accounts with Arizona's food producers. Additionally, buyers who attended this year depicted a wide array of those looking to procure closer to home, keeping more dollars in rural areas.

<http://www.azrdc.org>

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## IRP begins 2017 with Receipt of National Award

In 2017 the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) continued to expand its efforts to join diverse public and private resources in innovative collaborations to strengthen communities and improve life in rural Idaho.

The State Science & Technology Institute presented IRP with its *Prosperity Through Economic Opportunity* award in December of 2016.

A strategic planning workshop completed by the board of directors that same month allowed us to kick off 2017 off with a renewed sense of focus and momentum.

In the spring and fall of 2017 we conducted 3-day on the ground community reviews (or assessments) in the communities of Kimberly and Plummer.

We also initiated an extensive research project in collaboration the University of Idaho and rural development organizations in Montana and Wyoming to evaluate the community assessment programs in the three Northern Rocky Mountain states.

In mid-2017, IRP convened stakeholders to form a new working group to identify the status of broadband and the most promising strategies to increase access. This working group will continue to meet through the end of 2017 and possibly beyond.

Looking toward the future, IRP has its sights set on expanding our capacity to fulfill our responsibilities as Idaho's State Rural Development Council. Our intention is to develop new publications, multi-media, and other on-line resources in order to support community and economic development in all rural Idaho. These efforts will include sharing success stories from communities across the state. We're also working to become a trusted source of information for state legislators and other policymakers with respect to emerging conditions and opportunities in rural Idaho.

IRP would not exist without key government, private sector, educational, and nonprofit partners that include: Idaho Department of Commerce, Idaho Department of Transportation, University of Idaho and U of I Extension, Idaho State University, Idaho Housing and Finance Association, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, USDA Rural Development, Monsanto, Idaho National Laboratory, Rocky Mountain Power, Idaho Power, Avista, Elwood Staffing, Region IV Development Association, Idaho Chapter of the American Planning Association, Association of Idaho Cities. Special thanks to the Idaho Department of Labor for their in-kind contribution of office space and equipment.



Kimberly residents participate in their community review in April 2017.





# Illinois

## Illinois Rural Partners

Rural Partners is the federally designated rural development council for Illinois. Rural Partners is a statewide, member driven and member supported forum that links individuals, businesses, organizations and communities with public and private resources to maximize the potential of rural Illinois. Rural Partners focuses on improving the quality of life for individuals and communities across the state, through efforts that support economic vitality, quality of life and leadership development. Rural Partners members represent local, state and federal government agencies; non-profit organizations; communities; private businesses; and individuals. Its strength comes from its diverse, informed and engaged membership.

Rural Partners supports projects and participates in organizations and forums to advocate for rural development issues, including collaborating with the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) and the Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC), chaired by the Illinois Lt. Governor, to host a statewide conference focused on rural development. In 2017, 360 people attended the conference in Springfield, Illinois. Guest speakers included Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner, and Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti. Conference presentation topics included working with manufacturers, TIF districts, rural development after the recession, rural arts and creativity, telepharmacy, crowdfunding, population migration, rural revitalization, and more.

Rural Partners and its constituent members work with the GRAC to update the *Rural Illinois Resource Guide*, which is a searchable, online database, representing the most comprehensive collection of rural development resources in Illinois. Entries in the database include federal, state, local, and nonprofit organizations with a primary mission focused on rural development, and sources of grants, low-interest and forgivable loans, technical assistance, research, and other items of interest to rural community stakeholders. Rural Partners and several constituent members successfully wrote an application to the Stronger Economies Together (SET) program. SET is a University of Illinois Extension/USDA Rural Development program. Rural Partners members serve in advisory roles to the Illinois SET initiative, and have successfully completed SET projects in four regions of the state. Rural Partners and its members participate in rural development policy forums including the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, University of Illinois Extension Partners, Governor's Taskforce on the Creative Economy, the Illinois Statewide Independent Living Council, Township Officials of Illinois, the Illinois Comptroller's Rural Advisory Board, and the National Partners for Rural America (PRA) among other forums. Illinois Rural Partners member Jerry Townsend serves as past president of PRA.

## USDA, Shawnee Communications Promote Broadband Partnership

The shared vision of a connected rural Illinois, and the award of a \$4 million loan through USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service (RUS), were the basis for a celebratory Fiber Optic Launch for Moultrie Independent Telephone and parent company Shawnee Communications.

*"Fiber networks connect our rural communities to a digital future that expands access to jobs, education, health care and business services," said RUS Acting Administrator Chris McLean. "Working together, USDA and the private sector create opportunity, boost rural economies and strengthen our rural communities."*



USDA Assistant Administrator Keith Adams and Matt Johnson, VP with Shawnee Communications and Illinois Rural Partners Board Member.

[www.ruralpartners.org](http://www.ruralpartners.org)

## Iowa Rural Development Hosts First Summit, Attracts Huge Crowd!

The Iowa Rural Development Council stepped outside its comfort zone in 2016, moving from an information-sharing organization to resource provider and catalyst for identifying and addressing rural issues.

IRDC developed a plan to bring rural residents together to discuss the challenges and opportunities that currently exist. But rather than simply host an event and invite everyone, the Council extended invitations to a diverse group of communities. There was a catch, though. To attend the community had to bring a three-person team.

On a snowy November day in Jefferson, Iowa, more than 300 rural leaders, elected officials and interested residents convened to discuss their collective futures. RUPRI's Chuck Fluharty and Center for Rural Entrepreneurship's Don Macke spoke. Presentations focused on key issues. Much discussion and networking took place. Throughout the day, the group focused on the theme: "Inspire. Inform. Involve. Implement."

With that taste of success, IRDC is now positioned for additional activity and engagement. A strategic planning retreat will help the Council shape its future direction, with the possibility of an expanded membership base, annual dues, an operating budget and a new focus on broad engagement, public/private partnerships, targeted assistance and training, and enhanced advocacy for the 900+ small towns and rural areas in the state



*More than 300 rural Iowans representing 65 small towns and rural places attended the first-ever Iowa Rural Summit. They discussed everything from housing to arts and culture to engaging Millennials.*

### Iowa Rural Development Council Partners:

- Federal—HUD, SBA, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA Rural Development
- State—Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Iowa Economic Development Authority, Iowa Finance Authority, Iowa State University, University of Iowa, University of Northern Iowa
- Non-Governmental—Association of Business and Industry, Des Moines Area Community College, Iowa Telecommunications Alliance, Iowa Area Development Group, Iowa Farm Bureau, Professional Developers of Iowa

## Maryland Operating Budget Includes Historic Funding for Rural Communities

For the second time since its creation in 2006, the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund (RMPIF), a grant program administered by the Rural Maryland Council (RMC), will receive \$3,667,000 in funding for targeted investment to promote economic prosperity in Maryland's traditionally disadvantaged and underserved rural communities by sustaining efforts to promote rural regional cooperation, facilitating entrepreneurial activities and supporting key community colleges and nonprofit providers.

Last year, for the first time, RMPIF received \$2 million in funding. For Fiscal Year 2017, 23 grants were distributed to 23 organizations throughout the State. Information on grantees may be found at [rural.maryland.gov](http://rural.maryland.gov). The primary goal of RMPIF is to provide targeted investment to various regional, nonprofit, and educational entities in order to bring rural Maryland's standards of living up to statewide averages. The Governor is authorized, but not required, to include an appropriation in the annual Budget Bill for fiscal years 2008 through 2020. By sustaining efforts to promote rural regional cooperation, facilitating entrepreneurial activities and supporting key community colleges and nonprofit providers, the quality of life in rural Maryland can be advanced over the next several years.



*RMC Executive Director, Charlotte Davis, and RMC Board Chair, Josh Hastings, presented with the Rural Maryland Day Proclamation by Governor Larry Hogan on Rural Maryland Day 2016.*

The RMC also partnered with the nonprofit, Grow and Fortify, to host a successful 2016 Grow Maryland Value-Added Agriculture Summit, with nearly 200 attendees, which provided breakout sessions and information on value-added products, agri-tourism, law and liability, and more. The Rural Maryland Foundation (RMF) held outreach sessions throughout the year with free screenings and discussions of the documentary "Farmland".

On May 25, 2017, Governor Larry Hogan signed into law Senate Bill 717/ House Bill 1169 – Connecting Rural Maryland Act of 2017. The legislation establishes the Task Force on Rural Internet, Broadband, Wireless, and Cellular Service. The 22-member task force, which includes four members of the Senate and four members of the House of Delegates, must study and make recommendations regarding how Western Maryland counties; Southern Maryland counties; Eastern Shore counties; and Frederick, Carroll, and Harford counties can work together to obtain federal assistance to improve internet, broadband, wireless, and cellular services and accessibility in the affected counties. By November 30, 2017, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. Rural Maryland Council Executive Director, Charlotte Davis, has been named as the Chair of the task force.

For more information about the RMC, please contact:

**Charlotte Davis, Executive Director**, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401  
410.841.5774, [charlotte.davis@maryland.gov](mailto:charlotte.davis@maryland.gov)



## Increasing Opportunities in Rural Michigan

### Small Town and Rural Development Conference

Over 120 rural leaders gathered in April in Northern Michigan for the annual Michigan Small Town and Rural Development Conference. Presentations from rural communities across Michigan included topics such as expanding health food access in rural communities, attracting health care professionals, energy innovations, managing volunteers, rural health care issue, and the importance of local ownership building great places.



*Conference attendees learning about placemaking in rural communities*

Staff from Senator Debbie Stabenow's office were on-site to talk about progress on the farm bill and give an update on rural economic development issues happening in Washington DC.

The conference provides an opportunity to showcase topics critical to rural development in a way that facilitates discussion of new ideas and moves ideas to action. Participants are inspired to see the innovative ways that rural areas across the state and country are finding ways to drive economies, increase wealth of rural areas, and improving the lives of rural resident.

### Community Assessments

The Michigan Rural Council offers community assessments to rural communities in Michigan. The assessments provide an opportunity to assess a community's problems and challenges, identify assets, and define issues to be addressed. They are locally led and consist of multiple listening sessions in which everyone in the community has a chance to voice their opinion.

After the assessment, communities are provided with a written report which consists of findings from the workgroups and meetings, and opportunities and resources based upon the plans that come out of the assessment. They are also connected with other communities who have successfully completed projects to facilitate sharing of best practices.

In 2016, The Michigan Rural Council conducted assessments in Eaton Rapids and the Village of Shelby. Since 2012, the council has completed assessments in eighteen rural communities across Michigan.

### Community Grants

Grants of \$800 each were awarded to nine rural projects in Michigan in 2016. The projects included transforming an unusable gym into a maker space wood shop, increasing the safety of a community fitness trail, and upgrading a water system for a community garden serving a low-income neighborhood and the local food pantry.

**[rural.cedam.info](http://rural.cedam.info)**





## Utah Legislature's Rural Field Trip

The highlight of the past year was a two-day field trip by the entire Utah Legislature, organized and hosted by the Utah Rural Development Council (URDC). This was the second rural field trip by the Utah Legislature in the past three years, and it is quickly becoming established as the biennial tradition that rural leaders hoped it would become. It took several years of work on the part of the URDC and rural leaders to persuade the legislature to take the first trip in 2015, but the experience was so beneficial and informative that the legislature has determined to take a rural field trip every two years.

This year's tour traveled to southwest and central Utah, and included an overnight stay in Cedar City. The tour entourage consisted of 148 people on three tour busses, including 80% of all the legislators, 30 spouses, and 20 members of legislative staff. Stops included a coal power plant that is converting to natural gas; Utah's largest wind farm; a large solar project; hiking, ATVs, and horseback riding at Bryce Canyon National Park; a visit to small and remote rural high school (Piute High School); and a tour of the Gunnison State Prison. A total of 620 miles were traversed over the two-day period, and over 800 meals were consumed.

Because of long travel times between stops, the URDC took full advantage of the "bus time" by having presentations by local officials on each of the three busses as they travelled – rotating-in a new set of presenters at each stop. In all, there were six different presentations delivered by 18 different presenters. The main themes were renewable energy projects, tourism, rural education challenges, and public lands issues.

The tour was held in place of the legislature's monthly interim meetings, and gave legislators a chance to see, hear, and feel rural issues in a way that isn't possible in a typical committee meeting in the State Capitol building. It also gave local rural officials an unprecedented opportunity to educate legislators on their issues, concerns and priorities, and to build on-going relationships with both urban and rural lawmakers.

Utah Lt. Governor Spencer Cox declared afterward that this is one of the most important activities ever undertaken by rural Utah, and explained that it makes a tremendous difference during the legislative session when legislators can draw upon personal on-the-ground experience as they deal with rural issues.

## 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Utah Rural Summit

The Utah Rural Development Council and the Utah Center for Rural Life at Southern Utah University hosted the 29<sup>th</sup> annual Utah Rural Summit August 4-5, in Cedar City, Utah – the longest running rural development conference in the nation.

Each year the Summit is addressed by the Governor of the state of Utah, as well as by prominent national and regional speakers. This year's speakers, in addition to Governor Gary Herbert, included internationally acclaimed tourism consultant Roger Brooks and New York Knicks head coach Jeff Hornacek.

Attendees include government and business leaders from across the state, including legislators, county commissioners, city officials, economic development and planning professionals, and policy makers from both state and federal government offices. Approximately 250 people attended.

## Policy Accomplishments

This year the URDC, in partnership with the Governor's Rural Partnership Board, took a lead role in crafting, and guiding through the legislative process, a significant rural economic incentive bill – the Rural High Cost Infrastructure Tax Credit. This legislation allows a company making a capital investment in rural Utah to recoup up to 50% of the costs that go toward delivering basic infrastructure to a rural project. The tax credits can be applied toward infrastructure costs such as extending electricity and natural gas lines, water & sewer, roads, and even rail. The objective is to help mitigate the extra expenses that are often encountered in extending basic infrastructure to sites that are located outside of rural town's existing infrastructure network. The tax credits can go as high as \$30 million, and a company can spread them out for up to a 20 year period.



Utah Lt Gov Spencer addresses legislators in Delta, UT, as part of a two-day field trip to rural Utah.

## Community Visits

Each year, VCRD leads in-depth strategic action planning sessions in communities that help them set key priorities to revitalize their economies and quality of life, and connect with resources to get things done. In 2016, we led Community Visit processes in **Hardwick, Vernon, and Brighton/Island Pond**, and work on their selected priorities is already moving forward. Projects they are advancing include opening a recreational center, expanding recreation opportunities, expanding library space and services, building a business and economic development network, building a school and community partnership, developing mentorship and career building opportunities for youth, developing the riverfront, improving trails and outdoor recreation, building a community store and café, developing a business incubator, improving broadband, attracting and growing energy businesses, revitalizing and beautifying the downtown, supporting business growth and economic development, and more!



*Community members read the opportunities for action list together then take part in a dot-voting exercise to choose their top priorities for action.*

## Working Lands

VCRD recognizes the importance of a thriving farm and forest economy to our communities, environment, wildlife, recreation, and so many other aspects of the quality of life for Vermonters. In 2012, VCRD facilitated a process that built the Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Fund (WLEF) to support local agriculture and forestry, grow and attract farm and forest entrepreneurs, and conserve Vermont's working landscape into the future. To date, Vermont farm and forest businesses have been awarded \$3.8 million in WLEF grants and as a result have created 428 new jobs and increased sales by \$18.1 million. VCRD provides the ongoing structure for public relations, partnership development, and campaign implementation that celebrates the importance of this initiative in building on our shared values and growing our farm and forest economy, while ensuring future generations can enjoy the benefits of a thriving working landscape. <http://vtrural.org/programs/working-lands>.

## Vermont Climate Economy Initiative

We believe that the answer to the challenge of rural economic development and the renewal of rural Vermont is in the strategic advance of climate change solutions. The two Summits we've sponsored on the climate economy have resonated with the ideas that providing answers to climate change is "the greatest economic opportunity in world history" and fundamental to our ability to retain and attract creative young people who will have families and renew Vermont communities. In 2016, VCRD continued to build the **Climate Economy Partnership** to work with us in advancing these efforts; convened the **Climate Economy Action Team** working to share the narrative of success and hope through the climate economy and lead in policy development and advocacy based on the "*Progress for Vermont*" report developed in 2015 by the **Climate Change Economy Council**; and launched the **Climate Economy Model Communities Program** to help communities advance customized projects to increase economic vitality, improve quality of life, reduce climate impacts, and increase resilience through concentrated energy generation and efficiency offerings. <http://vtrural.org/programs/climate-economy>. In September 2017, VCRD is hosting a 3-day national climate economy Innovation Summit in Burlington Vermont—**ccecon: Catalysts of the Climate Economy**—aimed at attracting youth, entrepreneurs, and investors who are champions of progress toward future prosperity. Find out more and register at [ccecon17.com](http://ccecon17.com).

## PRWA Hosts Successful Rural Symposium in State Capitol

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017 Partners for Rural Washington (PRWA) collaborated with the State Department of Commerce to hold a Rural Symposium in Olympia WA, the state Capitol. The event, held at the Governor Hotel was attended by approximately 85 rural stakeholders and advocates and was opened by Governor Jay Inslee. Governor Inslee commented on the importance of investing in and promoting sustainable rural community and economic development in our state. The Symposium was an effort on the part of PRWA to gather current information on issues of top priority affecting the rural areas of our state.

This is the second such gathering held by PRWA, the first being in 2014 in Ellensburg in eastern Washington where PRWA called on rural stakeholders, communities, service providers, nonprofit organizations and various levels of government to meet and identify crucial rural needs and issues of top priority for rural areas. PRWA was in its formative stages as an agency at that time and this convening helped solidify ways PRWA could provide focused support for rural Washington.

The PRWA Board played a leading role in facilitating and hosting the April 12<sup>th</sup> Symposium and during the day, there was ample time for discussion, presentation and assessment around rural challenges as well as the good work already being done in the rural areas of Washington. A clear message was heard from attendees indicating that the time for innovation is now and the rural voice in Washington needs to be aggregated and elevated in a manner that can optimally benefit rural communities and regions.

Among the top items identified by attendees at the Symposium were the need for new models of rural investment, workforce and youth development, sustainable infrastructure including the need for high speed broadband, a lessening of government regulations, the need for rural advocacy and leadership development and the need for regular rural convenings to share best practices for community and economic development and success stories. Continued outreach to rural areas by PRWA was highly recommended with hopes that PRWA will continue to establish its top work priorities from ongoing feedback from the rural areas of our state.

**<http://www.partnersruralwa.org>**



PRA Executives L to R: Lael Duncan, WA; Christy Morton, VA; Jessica Ac-Moody, MI; Charlotte Davis, MD.



Kim Herman PRWA Board Chair with Washington Governor Jay Inslee.



## Rural Partners Recognizes the Best Rural Wisconsin Has to Offer

Wisconsin's Top Rural Development Initiatives award program is designed to identify, highlight, and share innovative models, practices and programs that have a positive impact on rural Wisconsin communities. Wisconsin Rural Partners created the program to provide a mechanism for rural communities to learn from each other. 2017 marked the 18th year awards have been made. "The four initiatives selected by the judges exemplify the best of all the great things rural Wisconsin has to offer," said Rural Partners Executive Director Rick Rolfsmeyer.

Awards were made to: the University of Wisconsin – Extension Community Vitality and Placemaking Team; Scenic Mississippi River Transit; Moving Platteville Outdoors, David Canny Rountree Branch Trail Project, and; Village of Sister Bay, Marketplace Redevelopment Project.

The awards ceremony was part of the 2017 Wisconsin Rural Summit, themed Who is the Future of Rural Wisconsin? that concentrated on the critical issue of attracting and retaining young people to rural areas. Over 100 attendees heard directly from young people regarding what attracted them to come to or remain in rural Wisconsin. A number of state elected officials and congressional representatives actively participated. The Summit also celebrated WRP's 25th anniversary.

Wisconsin Rural Partners is a non-profit corporation with a mission to promote leadership and collaboration to make rural Wisconsin thrive.

In addition to the annual Top Rural Development Initiatives and Wisconsin Rural Summit, Wisconsin Rural Partners also publishes Rural Wisconsin Today, meant to inform policy makers on the status and trends faced by Wisconsin's rural areas.

Wisconsin Rural Partners also works with a number of organizations to conduct Small Community Forums, which target places of 1,500 or fewer residents. These Forums are designed so that leaders from small communities in the region work together on issues important to them.

In 2017 Wisconsin Rural Partners collaborated with the University of Wisconsin Extension, Arts Wisconsin, USDA Rural Development, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities.

Wisconsin Rural Partners is a non-profit corporation with a mission to promote leadership and collaboration to make rural Wisconsin thrive.



*State senators and representatives join the Platteville, WI delegation receiving a 2017 WRP Top Rural Development award*



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## About the State Rural Development Councils

Pursuant to federal law, the State Councils are neutral, nonpartisan organizations composed of representatives from all levels of government, community and regional nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. State USDA mission area offices are nearly always participants, as are a varying mix of other federal agencies. This multi-stakeholder collaborative structure creates the best possible atmosphere to help citizens and policy-makers in rural areas develop vitality-improving projects and initiatives, reduce regulatory and other barriers, address their community needs and build confidence in the local and regional development process. Rural areas often have an overburdened local leadership and overworked county/municipal government staffs. The State Councils serve an essential need as an experienced convener and vehicle for collaboration between USDA, other Federal agencies, state agencies, the nonprofit community and the private sector. This helps the rural areas address their needs, grow their communities, create jobs and provide essential infrastructure while reducing duplication of government efforts and efficiently overlapping planning and funding assistance.

The SRDCs bring together diverse interest groups to build on local community assessments and strategic plans – both to set new directions in policy and program development and to use resources wisely in times of scarcity. The State Councils can tap the large network of experienced staff from other State Councils across the country to implement best practices, obtain technical assistance, determine funding sources and assist local leaders with community development. This information (gathered nationally) helps members of Congress identify and respond to needs through policy coordination and direction, proposed regulatory changes, targeted resources and private sector partnerships.

Many State Councils also take an active leadership in state rural summits and conferences generating a positive, nonpartisan climate for genuine advancement of policy issues, collaboration, best practices, attraction of resources and building of rural leadership capacity.

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State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) address a wide variety of issues that affect rural areas as is shown in the brief highlights of recent initiatives in this report. Given the complexity and range of Councils' efforts, these highlights provide a glimpse – not a complete picture – of that work. SRDCs' work improves the ability of key rural institutions to function effectively and other SRDC programs have more direct impact on rural citizens. In all cases, however, the Councils are working to improve the quality of life in rural America.

Following is contact information for active Councils for which highlights of their work are not included in this report.

**Missouri** – [www.mrdp.net](http://www.mrdp.net)

**Nevada** – [www.ruralnevada.org](http://www.ruralnevada.org)

**Oregon** – [cmarko@rcac.org](mailto:cmarko@rcac.org)

**Pennsylvania** – [whsturges@gmail.com](mailto:whsturges@gmail.com)

**Virginia** – [www.cfrv.org](http://www.cfrv.org)

**Wyoming** – [www.wyomingrural.org](http://www.wyomingrural.org)





L to right: Jon Barrett, ID; Kimber Lanning, AZ; Jessica AcMoody, MI; Christy Morton, VA; Paul Costello, VT; Lael Duncan, WA; Charlotte Davis, MD.

Partners for Rural America dedicate the 2017 Annual Report to Ricky Rolfsmeyer, retiring Executive Director of Wisconsin Rural Partners, where he served with distinction and commitment for 28 years. Ricky leaves a lasting legacy of innovation, collaboration and accomplishments in rural Wisconsin and as a leader in Partners for Rural America where he was recognized with the Ron Shaffer Award.

**2016/2017 PRA officers:**

Chair: Christy Morton, Council of Rural Virginia  
 Vice-Chair: Wes Curtis, Utah Rural Development Council  
 Secretary: Charlotte Davis, Rural Maryland Council  
 Asst Secretary: Jessica AcMoody, Michigan Rural Council  
 Treasurer: Paul Costello, Vermont Council on Rural Development  
 Past Board Chair: Jerry Townsend, Illinois Rural Council



*Working together to improve the quality of life in rural America*