

New Initiatives of the State of Iowa - Great Places

Anita Walker - Director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs

The Future of Economic Development in Rural America

Anita Walker also serves as executive director of the Iowa Arts Council, administrator of the state historical society, and state historic preservation officer. Walker was a leader in the development of a statewide cultural vision for Iowa called Imagine Iowa 2010, which launched a number of innovative community-based projects.

Walker noted that Governor Vilsack launched the Iowa Great Places (IGP) concept in January 2006 to help transform Iowa's economy.³⁴ "The governor made two challenges," explained Walker. "First, he challenged Iowans across the state to think about the place where they live and to be bold and creative in capitalizing on what is genuine, authentic, and special about that place. Second, he challenged state government agencies to do a better job of working together." The IGP is designed to bring together the resources of state government to build capacity in communities, regions, neighborhoods and districts to cultivate the unique and authentic qualities of the areas.

"The first thing we did to get started," said Walker, "was identify what makes a great place." Her team found that it's not just one particular attribute; rather, "greatness" is achieved when several key factors combine simultaneously. She identified the following seven key dimensions of a great place:

- **A Unique Sense of Place** – This is an identity that makes a place feel special, such as its history, ethnic background, or natural resources.
- **Engaging Experiences** – The experiences that people have when in a great place are what they remember when they leave and what connects the person with the place.
- **A Rich Social Fabric** – Great places are places where everyone feels welcome and there is an opportunity for all people to interact.

- **A Vital Economy** – Residents must be able to make a living in a great place. It's not just about finding jobs, but providing an environment that nurtures both entrepreneurship and opportunities for advancement.

- **A Pleasing Environment** – People like places that are clean, attractive, and beautiful. If a place is well maintained, it shows that people care about it.

- **A Strong Foundation** – A great place needs to have the basic infrastructure; i.e., good roads, sewers, water, telecommunications, education, and healthcare.

- **A Creative Culture** – A great place needs to be open to new and creative ideas.

"This program redefines the way government does business with the people of Iowa," Walker said. "Rather than asking communities and local leaders to make their plans fit state programs, we have identified the programs and resources that can be used to make their dreams and visions come true. Rather than building a community's dream piece by piece, we are synchronizing and streamlining programs, working in collaboration with local leaders, and combining resources for high impact and results."

The Great Places Citizen Advisory Board chose three cities for the pilot project: Clinton, Coon Rapids, and Sioux City. These cities were not selected because they were the best great places, but because they were identified as three different examples or "test tubes" for state agencies to determine if there was a new way to collectively deliver services in a focused way. "Can we in state government – in different state agencies – have more impact and results working in concert rather than working separately?" asked Walker. "This is what we need to find out." The board also looked at each community's level of readiness to move forward with implementing its vision.

The plans call for: improving infrastructure; transforming worn areas of the towns into community centers; renovating and creating dining, entertainment, and recreational areas; and developing programs that highlight special geographical and architectural features of the cities.

Walker stated that IGP program encourages economic development by encouraging more creative and holistic planning. State government and lowans work together to synchronize and streamline programs to fit into a vision, not to make the vision fit state programs, she said. Having locals who can leverage the resources of the state, she said, is the most important asset needed when developing the IGP concept.

Conclusion

Conference participants generally concluded that the future of economic development in rural America will prove to be a major challenge but holds much promise. As Midwest agriculture and rural development face diverging population trends amid new technologies, the future economic health of rural areas and their community banks will find strength through building on the agricultural tradition of entrepreneurship and promoting business formation. The quality of infrastructure in rural areas will hold the key. There is much potential for a biochemical industry to play a significant part of rural America's economic future and it is becoming clear that increasing emphasis should be placed on a global food and agriculture policy. Government can play a constructive and nurturing role by providing an environment that is conducive to long-term economic growth; however, rules must be implemented in a manner that maximizes the benefits redounding to rural areas.

The Chicago Fed will continue to organize and participate in forums that support and enhance the economic development of rural areas. Please visit the conference website at www.chicagofed.org/news_and_conferences/news/index.cfm to download conference presentations and view upcoming information about future conferences.

Notes

- 1 The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago is the headquarters for the Federal Reserve System's Seventh District, which is comprised of Iowa and most of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. For more information, see Frequently Asked Questions – Federal Reserve Banks, available at www.federalreserve.gov/generalinfo/faq/faqfrbanks.htm.
- 2 USDA term that considers population density and other factors.
- 3 To identify metropolitan counties, we used the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes, a typology developed in the 1970s and updated after each decennial census. The most recent version of the codes was released in August 2003.
- 4 Jeffrey Walser and John Anderlik, *supra* note 1, available at www.fdic.gov/bank/analytical/banking/2005jan/art2table9.html.
- 5 All balance sheet growth rates were merger adjusted.
- 6 The FDIC defines farm banks as institutions where at least 25 percent of total loans are made for production agriculture or are secured by farm real estate.
- 7 While the region's primary crops are heavily subsidized, cattle, another important product in the Great Plains, are not.
- 8 Jeffrey Walser and John Anderlik, *supra* note 1, citing Drabenstott, Henry and Gibson (1987), 51.
- 9 Visit the Web site of Wisconsin's Top Rural Development Initiatives program at www.wirural.org.
- 10 The Main Street Economist, Commentary on the Rural Economy, Wildlife Recreation: Rural America's Newest Billion Dollar Industry, Jason Henderson, Center for the Study of Rural America, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, April 2004, available at www.kc.frb.org/RuralCenter/mainstreet/MSE_0404.pdf.
- 11 *Id* at 1.
- 12 Visit Wisconsin's Top Rural Development Initiatives regarding wildlife recreation at www.wisconsinbirds.org/trail (Great Wisconsin Birding & Nature Trail site) and www.waupacacountyparks.com/parks/park.cfm?id=28 (Wolf River Sturgeon Trail site).
- 13 For more information on the annual Bald Eagle Watch, visit www.saukprairie.com.
- 14 Visit the Potosi Brewery Restoration Web site at www.potosibrewery.com.
- 15 Visit Wisconsin's Top Rural Development Initiatives regarding the creative economy at www.nicksgrandview.org (Grandview Folk Art site) and http://www.uwplatt.edu/cont_ed/artsbuild (ArtsBuild – SmART Communities site).

- 16 Per Andrew Anderson, the figures are as of January 2005 and based on reports provided by award recipients. Figures do not include all 13 Vision Iowa projects.
- 17 To learn more, visit www.extension.iastate.edu/ag/fscrops/crops7.html. White also recommended the Iowa State University Viticulture home page as the best source for information about Iowa wine and grape production, at <http://viticulture.hort.iastate.edu>.
- 18 Iowa: Viticulture (grapes) 101, Michael L. White, Dec. 2, 2004, Integrated Crop Management Conference, available at <http://viticulture.hort.iastate.edu/info/pdf/icmgrapes101.pdf>.
- 19 Visit the Iowa Wine Growers Association at www.iowawinegrowers.org.
- 20 The Web site for The Economic Development Group, Ltd. is at www.tomjacobgroup.com.
- 21 Building a Brighter Future for Rural Illinois: Goals for Stronger Communities, Illinois Rural Partners, Springfield, Ill., 1998, available at www.communitydevelopment.uiuc.edu/PDFs/strategicplan.pdf.
- 22 The Illinois Enterprise Zone Program was signed into law December 7, 1982 (20 ILCS 655/1) (from Ch. 67 1/2, par. 601) Sec. 1. There have been 95 enterprise zones established by the Illinois Legislature and approved by the governor's office for specific areas.
- 23 The Web site for Rural Sourcing, Inc. is at www.ruralsource.com.
- 24 The Web site for The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) is at www.ilsr.org/index.html.
- 25 The Web site for the ILSR New Rules Project is at www.newrules.org. The project proposes a set of new rules that builds community by supporting humanly scaled politics and economics.
- 26 The Leopold Center is a research and education center with statewide programs to develop sustainable agricultural practices that are both profitable and conserve natural resources. The Web site is at www.leopold.iastate.edu/index.htm.
- 27 The Web site for the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, is at www.ers.usda.gov.
- 28 To read more of Stenberg's research, see Peter L. Stenberg, Communications & the Internet in Rural America, Economic Research Service/USDA, Agricultural Outlook, June-July 2002, available at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/agoutlook/JuneJuly2002/ao292h.pdf. Also see other articles and information at the rural telecommunications briefing room on the ERS Web site at www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/telecom.
- 29 The Web site of the Mahaska Communication Group is at www.mahaska.org.
- 30 The Web site of the Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association is at www.wsta.info.
- 31 The Web site of the Michigan Broadband Development Authority is at www.michigan.gov/cis/0,1607,7-154-28077_28233--,00.html.
- 32 The LinkMichigan telecommunications infrastructure report is located at www.michigan.org/medc/news/reports/economic/combo.asp?ContentID=94595AF5-BAE2-4BEE-856A-22DA8A130538.
- 33 Id at 5 (Executive Summary).
- 34 The Web site of the Great Places program is at www.culturalaffairs.org/greatplaces/index.htm.

Steven W. Kuehl summarized the conference sessions.

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