



Kellogg Foundation Awards Grant to HomeTown Competitiveness Program

Lincoln- A \$100,000 grant has been awarded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support the work of the HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) Program in Nebraska, according to Caroline M. Carpenter, Program Director for Food Systems and Rural Development.

The program is a collaborative effort of the Nebraska Community Foundation, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, and the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. It works in rural communities to help them identify reachable goals and strategies focused on reversing rural decline, including building leadership and community capacity, attracting young people, fostering local philanthropy and supporting entrepreneurship.

The Omaha World-Herald, in a November 28, 2004 editorial, applauded the HTC plan to plant seeds to reverse Nebraska's "brain drain," and "to plant an idea with young Nebraskans: You *can* make a life back home. It's not impossible. And if you go off to see the world, remember: This is a place worth coming home to." The World-Herald said the strategy is the second phase of the Nebraska Community Foundation's campaign, which has been urging Nebraskans to bequeath a share of their assets to their hometowns.

"The second phase won't be as effective without the first. For it takes money - locally supplied, sometimes supplemented by government funds and advice - to enable small towns to preserve that intangible thing called 'The Good Life' for whoever may be looking for it," the editorial said.

HTC began as a pilot project in Valley County and Ord, Nebraska in 2002 as one of nine innovative pilot projects funded by the National Rural Funders' Collaborative in 2002-2003. HTC has grown to include training academies that train teams from across the United States to implement the approach. It has now expanded to include the communities and counties of Stuart/Atkinson, Valley County, Perkins and Chase Counties, Knox County and the Sand hills counties of Grant and Hooker.

New sites are being established in David City and O'Neill. The expansion has been made possible by the help of two utility companies-Consolidated Companies, Inc. and Great Plains Communications-Community Development Block Grants administered

by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development; and local community resources.

“This very generous grant from the Kellogg Foundation will support the existing Hometown Competitiveness sites, help start up new sites and expand academies and replication of the program in other states,” said Jeff Yost, President and CEO of the Nebraska Community Foundation.

The first national HTC academy was held in Omaha in last February, with 53 attendees from 18 states and Australia. A second academy will be held January 25-27, 2005 in Omaha. Regional HTC academies were held in Norfolk, NE and Wamego, KS in 2004 and others are planned in Holyoke, CO and Canadian, TX in 2005.

(HTC) received the 2004 Innovative Program Award from the Community Development Society, whose members come from 32 countries and the United States. The award was presented in July at the Society’s annual convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

According to Don Mackey, co-director of the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and Milan Wall, co-director of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, Hometown Competitiveness (HTC) is making a positive difference demonstrated through a number of exciting developments:

- In the Sandhills, high school seniors are talking about returning home after college to start a business and raise a family.
- In Valley County, businesses are being transferred to younger people, and outside investors are renovating vacant buildings.
- In Stuart and Atkinson, students are engaged in decision-making for a youth foundation and enrolling in an entrepreneurship class.
- In Knox County, young people are developing strategies to build partnerships across community and cultural lines, and 35 schoolteachers and administrators are helping to plan a youth entrepreneurship fair in 2005.
- Perkins and Chase counties are sponsoring a joint leadership program, and high school students are being recruited to serve on city councils.