

**Elkton Community Education Center Moving Forward:  
A Consultant Report**

by

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Elkton Community Education Center Moving Forward: A Consultant Report**

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This report briefly details the history of the Elkton Community Education Center (ECEC), a project in rural Elkton, Oregon, which seeks to provide opportunities for multi-generational collaboration in the areas of education, enterprise, and environment. It also looks at three other similar projects nationwide. After analyzing the strengths of ECEC and the similar projects, it makes recommendations on how ECEC should strengthen and change its programs for maximum community impact and sustainability into the future.

## Introduction

Modern research and discussion does not often focus on the American small town. In many parts of the country, small towns, their economies dependent on the extraction of natural resources, have suffered greatly in the last decades. Their populations have declined and their economies slowed. In many places retirees are replacing families.

In Elkton, a very small town in rural southwestern Oregon, a group of citizens have responded to the decline in resources and change in demographic trends by creating a multi-purpose community education center, Elkton Community Education Center (ECEC). Though it has been in existence since 1999, the center's director and board have recently started to give serious thought as to how ECEC should move forward, which of its programs are most beneficial to the community, and whether or not those programs are sustainable. The purpose of this report is to guide ECEC in taking their next steps, with the goals of making the biggest possible impact in the community and sustaining the programs into the future.

In the first chapter, I discuss Elkton itself. After a brief introduction to the history, economy, and demography of the city, I turn my attention to the particular issues the community currently faces. Though they are by no means the only problems in Elkton, I focus here on pressures on the local public schools, the lack of libraries and other county-level services, and the dearth of jobs for teenagers in Elkton. All of these are stressors on the community that have been or could be addressed, at least in part, through the community center model.

The second chapter of the paper looks at ECEC in more depth. After discussing ECEC's beginnings and history, the chapter goes on to discuss the specific issues ECEC is facing currently. These problems include the need for increased funding, overextension in programming and management, and lack of positive interaction with local schools.

In the third chapter, I turn my attention to other efforts that are similar to ECEC. One of these is also in Oregon, south of Elkton in Josephine County. Another is across the country in Fairfield, Vermont. The third is in Appalachian Ohio. Studying the histories, and in particular the successes, of these similar projects provides models that ECEC may follow as it moves forward.

In the fourth and final chapter of the report, I offer recommendations for how ECEC should change its model, both in terms of drawing on new funding sources and tailoring programs with an eye towards sustainability for the changing community. Specifically, I suggest that ECEC explore the possibility of government-based funding sources. I also propose concentrating on a few of the strongest programs and phasing out less useful and popular services, and considering implementing new programs that may increase the draw of the center and willingness of donors to support it, as well as increasing interaction with local schools. Finally, I provide recommendations as to how ECEC might restructure its management and staffing to coordinate its various programs and projects more effectively.

## Chapter 1: Elkton

Elkton, Oregon is much like any other very small town. Everyone knows everyone else, the businesses are all locally owned, and there are not any stoplights. When asked why they like living there, citizens respond that they love feeling safe, having a close-knit community, and being close to nature. To the outside observer, Elkton appears bucolic, with a single main street dotted with a few businesses, two small school buildings, and a population of only about 200 citizens within the city limits (though there are probably about 2,000 in the general area) nestled in a green valley.

Like every other small town in America, though, Elkton has a unique history, strengths, and needs. The Elkton area was originally populated by Native Americans, then by the Hudson Bay Company, who maintained Fort Umqua there, where the Umqua River meets Elk Creek. By the 1850s, Elkton was settled as a town, and it served as an early county seat for its southwestern Oregon county, Douglas County.

From its incorporation, the major industry in Elkton was timber. Currently, the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department includes Elkton on a list of Oregon communities whose economies are dependent on the timber industry.<sup>1</sup> However, the Oregon timber industry has never been a wholly consistent economic force. After taking hold in the late 19th century, timber was a steadily growing business until after World War II (with the expected slump during the Depression). Post-war construction led to a timber boom that lasted through the mid-1960s. As environmental concerns grew, the timber industry slowly declined, suffering a major recession in the early 1980s from which the industry has never fully recovered. It has not just been environmental protection that has slowed timber, however, but also market conditions and competition from overseas, and the overall output of Oregon forests has slowly declined for several decades.<sup>2</sup> Between 1986 and 2003, the Oregon timber processing capacity decreased 40%.<sup>3</sup> This decrease in the timber industry has translated into a decrease in jobs and wealth in Oregon. In 1979, the Oregon timber industry employed about 100,700 people and generated approximately \$5.3 billion in labor income. In 2003, the industry employed 65,700 people and paid out about \$3.3 billion in labor income.<sup>4</sup>

The demography of many small Oregon towns, including Elkton, has followed timber industry trends. In 1970, the Elkton population was 176; by 2000, it was 147. In 2000 (the most recent detailed data available), 22.4% of Elkton's population was over the age of 65 (as compared to 12.4% nationally); while the median national age in 2000 was 35.3, the median age in Elkton was 46.3. The decrease in timber industry jobs is correlated with a decrease in residence by working-age adults and families. Though the population is currently on an upswing (2006 data report 205 residents in the city limits), this rise is attributed almost completely to retirees.<sup>5</sup>

With the decrease in non-retired population, Elkton is facing a new set of problems. Many of these problems stem around the local schools. In 1990, Oregon passed Ballot Measure 5, which put limits on local property taxes and severely affected some Oregon schools, particularly small ones like those in Elkton. During Measure 5's five-year phase-in period, property tax receipts in Oregon fell approximately \$700 million, or 23% (adjusted to 2005 dollars).<sup>6</sup> This led to a greater share of school funding coming from the state, rather than local communities, which was hardest on small schools (due to per-student state-funding matrixes also

enacted in the 1990s). Additional tax reform measures in 1996-97 continued this trend. In Elkton, the reductions in school funding led to lay-offs in faculty (including teachers), grade blending, reduction of extracurricular activities and electives including music, drama, and art, and deferred maintenance on buildings, among other things. In recent years, declining numbers of students have exacerbated school funding issues, and there have been discussions about closing the schools or consolidating with other small towns nearby, though nothing serious has come of them at this point.

Schools have not been the only sufferers as the local economy has struggled. While neighboring towns have their own county library branches, Elkton has never had its own branch. However, for many years a mobile library, called a bookmobile, visited Elkton twice a month. In the 1990s, county funding cuts forced an end to this program, leaving Elkton residents at least 14 miles away from the closest library. Other county services, such as extension courses and basic health services, have never been available in Elkton, or were once available on a very limited basis and are now non-existent.

Another issue that the Elkton community faces is a shortage of available jobs for teenagers. While this has always been an issue in a town with few businesses, the problem gets worse as the working-age population decreases and businesses close. In 2004, one of three local restaurants closed, and just this small change had a great effect on the number of jobs available to local teens. Though some seasonal work is available in local vineyards and on local farms, most Elkton teenagers have few if any options for part-time jobs.

It would not be unfair to characterize Elkton's current state as in transition from a small timber town to a retirement community. Whether this transition will be completed is hard to know, but it has become important to some residents to do all they can to address the problems of it in the meantime. The broadest and most far-reaching of these solutions is Elkton Community Education Center.

**Footnotes:**

1 Oregon Fish & Wildlife Office, "Timber Dependent Communities in Oregon," <http://www.fws.gov/pacific/jobs/orojitw/timber.htm>.

2 Conway, F.D.L. and G.E. Wells, "Timber in Oregon: History & Projected Trends," Oregon State University Extension Service, January 1994, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/em/em8544/>.

3 Brandt, Jason P., et al, "Oregon's Forest Products Industry and Timber Harvest 2003," USDA, August 2006, [www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw\\_gtr681.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr681.pdf), p. 4.

4 Ibid, p. 46.

5 U.S. Census Bureau, "Elkton City, Oregon Fact Sheet."

6 Bailey, Scott, "Education Funding in Oregon: How We Got Into This Mess, and How to Get Out of It," Oregon's Future, Winter 2005, p. 3.

## **Chapter 2: Elkton Community Education Center (ECEC)**

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of the Elkton Community Education Center (ECEC). First, I introduce the reader to the center's founder, then briefly describe some of the projects that have been undertaken in ECEC's first eight years and how these projects have made a difference in the Elkton community. Finally, I discuss some of the challenges ECEC is facing as they move forward.

Carol Beckley has lived in Elkton for many years. She raised her children there, and worked for seventeen years as the business teacher at Elkton High School. She and her late husband, John, also ran a ranch that has been passed down through John's family. She and John always intended, after their children were grown, to start a youth employment summer program on their ranch, but both of their ill health and John's death in the early 1980s stalled these plans. Carol had also wanted to start some sort of business education project for Elkton students after her retirement, but this plan, too, was put on a back burner for many years, as she focused on regaining her health, traveling, and other projects.

### ***Pre-School***

In 1999, several things happened at once to help bring some of Carol's previous goals to fruition. The local pre-school, a private enterprise taught by Yvonne Compton, lost the space it was renting at the elementary school and was struggling to find an alternate location. Without a pre-school in Elkton, families depending on the service would either have to drive their children to pre-schools up to 30 miles away or children would not attend pre-school at all. Yvonne's pre-school had been serving not as full-time child care, but as a focused program preparing children to transition to public school.

At the same time, a 30-acre piece of river front property adjacent to the elementary school, along Highway 38, which runs through Elkton on the way to the Oregon coast, came up for sale. The property was largely undeveloped and suffered from considerable erosion, and had only a double-wide mobile home and a small garage on it. The seller, in a hurry to unload the property, offered it to Carol, who owned significant local property, at a discount if she would buy it right away. Though many of her friends and neighbors, including her new partner, Jim Gates, doubted her decision, Carol purchased the property, with the idea of turning the existing garage into a pre-school space.

Even with the new space, the pre-school was not a self-sustaining project. Though parents paid tuition for their children to attend, the enrollment was not large enough for tuition to pay for the necessary supplies and provide Yvonne with a salary. At the same time, Carol was forming other ideas of things that could be done with the property she purchased to help her community, so she decided to start a non-profit organization, the Elkton Community Education Center (ECEC). Soon, ECEC was a registered non-profit entity, with a board of directors.

The original mission statement dedicated ECEC to "multi-generational interaction in the areas of environment, education, and enterprise."<sup>7</sup> Carol and the first board saw holes in their community, many of which were new as the population's age inched forward and resources were scarce, that they believed could be filled, at least in part, by a private, non-profit project like ECEC. In addition to running the pre-school, Yvonne was hired to coordinate other activities for ECEC as they arose, for which she was paid a salary. As well as providing a home and support

for the pre-school, Carol envisioned a project that would provide business training and job possibilities for Elkton's teenagers, though it was not yet clear how these goals would be met. At this point, Carol was not only ECEC's chair, but also its sole benefactor.

### ***Native Tree and Plant Garden***

Another long-time dream of Carol's was to have a native tree and shrub garden, where representatives from all of Oregon's native species would be identified so that tourists, students, and other interested people could walk through and learn about the diversity of Oregon's plant and tree life. She had always assumed she would do this on her ranch, but given the space she had purchased for ECEC, with both empty land and proximity to the schools and the highway through Elkton, it seemed a natural fit to build the garden there instead.

[Photo: Native trees with identification kiosk]

In 2000, Carol contacted D.L. Phillips Nursery, a tree farm located just across the Umpqua river from ECEC, and asked if they would donate the trees to make some of ECEC's land into a park. The nursery agreed, and in February 2001 ECEC had its first big volunteer day, a tree planting. In one day, 65 community members, ages 3 to 73, planted 500 trees over 4.5 acres. The trees are organized by climate zone, with representatives from every climate in Oregon, most of which grow fairly easily in Elkton.

In addition to trees, the park now includes shrubs, flowers, and native berries. An area Eagle Scout troop built bench and table combinations to donate to the park, and a local student designed and built information kiosks as his high school senior project. Park maintenance, including mowing the laws, weeding, watering, and maintaining paths, is accomplished with a combination of volunteer labor and student summer labor.

### ***Butterfly Pavilion***

Once the native garden was planted, Carol turned her attention to ways in which to draw people to stop at ECEC. On a trip to British Columbia, Carol and Jim visited a butterfly pavilion, and Jim was instantly interested. "I knew we were in trouble when I watched Jim and he said 'we could do something like this!'" Carol remembers.<sup>8</sup> The type of pavilion they had visited, which hosted many exotic species of butterflies, would have been prohibitively expensive to recreate, so Carol began to research the concept of a smaller native butterfly pavilion. She got in touch with the Oregon State Department of Agriculture, from whom she learned that there are eight native butterfly species that could be raised and released in Elkton.

Enraptured with the butterfly idea, Jim designed several small, connected buildings that were then built on the ECEC land, between the existing pre-school building and the already growing native tree and plant garden. One was a classroom, one a research area, another a screened butterfly habitat, and a fourth space for a future gift shop. Then Carol, Jim, and Yvonne flew to Connecticut to attend a butterfly-raising course. After they returned, they began the work of turning the new buildings into a full habitat to raise and release native Oregon butterflies, with an attached educational center.

[Photo: Inside the ECEC butterfly pavilion]

### ***Gift Shop***

Local retiree Wilma Llewellyn, who had previously run a gift shop professionally, volunteered to manage a gift shop at ECEC, which opened in the summer of 2002. The first summer, the gift shop did not do much business, but interest has increased every year (it is only open during the summer, when the pavilion is open for tours, and for a short time over the holidays). For the most part, the items sold there are on a commission basis, and the inventory includes work by approximately seventeen artists from the Elkton area. Items for sale in the shop include soap, candles, jewelry, handmade hats, and ceramics. One of the shop's most recent inventory additions is note cards made by Elkton High School art students.

As interest in the gift shop grew, Wilma began to consider ways to increase the impact it could have in the Elkton community during the non-summer months. In 2006, she came upon the idea of a Valentine's Day Celebration, wherein the shop would be open, with limited Valentine's-appropriate inventory, and joined by the local Eastern Star Club, who would have a chocolate-themed bake sale, and Anindor Vineyard, a local winery, who would hold a tasting. Rather than limiting the event to ECEC, however, Wilma thought it would be better to make it a city-wide affair, so she got in touch with local businesspeople, including both local restaurants and the other three local wineries, and they coordinated Valentine's-themed events, including lunch and dinner specials and wine tastings, all over town. Elkton's Valentine's Celebration was advertised in six area newspapers, and local restaurants reported being especially busy that day. "It turned out to be a fun day," Wilma remembers, "and it was something the community tied together with, which was really great."<sup>9</sup>

### ***Library***

After the butterfly pavilion and native gardens were up and running, the next big project suggested for ECEC was a lending library. Ellie Smart, a local resident and retired school teacher, approached Carol with the idea for this project. The library, housed in the mobile home originally on the property, is made up almost entirely of donated books (ECEC bought a few books about area history), and staffed by volunteers, coordinated by Ellie. As well as offering its own selection of books (about 2,000 currently) for borrowing, the ECEC library also serves as a coordination point for the county library, with a volunteer making weekly county library runs to pick up books requested by Elkton residents and drop off books with which they are finished. The library also hosts a monthly book discussion group. The mobile home that houses the ECEC library is also used as a meeting house for small groups, and has a bedroom that is made up to rent out if the need arises (there are no hotels in Elkton).

[Photo: ECEC library and meeting house]

### ***Art Gallery***

After several years of running the pre-school at ECEC, and with the growth of the other projects, it became clear that Yvonne's salary was eating too much out of ECEC's small budget. In 2004, Carol and board decided that the pre-school could remain in the building, but that they would no longer be able to keep Yvonne on as ECEC's paid coordinator. At the same time, an opportunity arose, through state grant funding, to move the pre-school back to the elementary school campus and hire Yvonne as an employee of the school district to teach it, so Yvonne left ECEC and the pre-school moved from ECEC back to the elementary school.

After the pre-school moved out, it was not long until Carol was approached with an idea for a new use for its building. Two local painters, Joan Arsenault and Jane Wood, met through the ECEC library's book discussion group and wanted to use the space to show their work, so in short order the garage was once again re-imagined, this time as an art gallery. Several art shows have been held there, including, most recently, a quilt show. The art space has also been used to host community art classes for both adults and children, and as meeting space for local group, including a monthly seniors group.

[Photo: ECEC Art Gallery]

### ***Sculpture***

Not long after the art gallery was opened, the idea of large-scale sculpture in the native garden was suggested. One sculpture was commissioned specifically for ECEC (the artist donated his time and local businesses donated labor and materials for installation). Another sculpture, a large piece depicting trees, was erected with funds earned by two local bicycle enthusiasts, Jeff and Randi Smith, who took pledges for a ride across the country, as well as yet more volunteer labor.

[Photo: Tree sculpture at ECEC]

### ***Greenhouse***

About two years ago, ECEC took on another large project, growing plants to sell in their own green house. Carol purchased a piece of property with a large greenhouse on it, and, with the help of volunteer labor, disassembled the greenhouse, moved it to ECEC, and reassembled it. Since then, Carol has done much of the work of starting plants in the spring, and after school is out she is helped by student laborers to tend to them. Throughout the summer, the plants are sold to help fund ECEC projects. The greenhouse is also used to start plants for the native garden.

[Photo: Inside ECEC greenhouse]

### ***Student Employment***

From ECEC's beginnings, it was part of the goal of both Carol and the board to provide business and enterprise training for Elkton students. This training initially took the form of a summer program for selected students, in which they worked at the butterfly pavilion and in the native garden, doing things as diverse as weeding, doing research and creating educational materials, and giving tours. The program has evolved from employing two students when it began in the summer of 2002 to employing six students full-time and six more in four-week increments in the summer of 2007. The arenas in which the students work have also expanded, and now include tending plants in the greenhouse and being baristas at the student-run seasonal espresso stand in ECEC's parking lot.

The students employed at ECEC not only do the labor on which the organization depends, but learn management skills as well. During their first summer as student workers, they take on four-week "internships," during which they are given extensive training on not only identifying plants and trees and raising butterflies, but also leadership, public speaking, doing payroll, teamwork, interviewing skills, and other important business skills. As well as being paid for these internships, students earn high school credit for their summer work. After their

internship year, students who succeed are invited back for a second summer as full-time summer employees.

One Elkton teen, Amy Smith, has been a part of ECEC's student enterprise programs since the beginning. She began as a volunteer the summer after she was in eighth grade, in 2001, and became one of ECEC's first two paid student employees the next summer. She continued to spend her summers working for ECEC all through high school. In 2006-2007, while attending her first year in community college nearby, she became the coordinator for the student education program. When asked why the program is important to local teens, Amy explains that there are very few available jobs for teens in Elkton, and ECEC provides them not only with a source of summer income, but with training ground for a lot of valuable skills, including research, working outdoors and with plants, teaching/public speaking, and customer service. The strength of the program, she says, is that it offers students a taste of so many different types of things that may peak their interests for the future.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Amphitheater***

After the native park was planted, ECEC applied for grants from the Ford Foundation and Meyer Memorial Trust to work on the garden's infrastructure and build an amphitheater. Each organization granted the center \$30,000, and in 2002 they built an amphitheater (with volunteer labor) and purchased a full outdoor sound system. The facility seats 200 people. The space has since been used to host several large events, including annual community celebrations and concerts. In the summer of 2007, ECEC held its first all-day musical extravaganza, featuring bands from all over the region, representing several different styles of music.

[Photo: ECEC amphitheater]

### ***Fort Umpqua Replica***

The most recent large project ECEC has taken on is the construction of a replica of Fort Umpqua, the original Hudson Bay Company fort around which Elkton was built (in existence 1835-1851). Though ECEC is not located on the site of the original fort, its riverfront property is very similar to the original site, and it is very nearby. When it is complete, the replica will include a stockade, bastions, gate, and three buildings, as well as a heritage garden and orchard, and a row of trees will be planted between the fort site and the rest of ECEC (and the highway), to give visitors a feeling of seclusion appropriate to the experience of visiting the fort.<sup>11</sup>

The fort project is envisioned to be a museum and educational site, as well as a place to house local history artifacts, some of which have already been donated from local people. Like the native tree and plant garden and the butterfly pavilion, the replica fort will be available for student-led public tours when it is completed. Carol and the ECEC board also hope to see it become a destination for field trips for area schools.

### ***Community Celebrations and Events***

Currently, ECEC's calendar includes two major annual celebrations. The first, Blooms and Butterflies, is held in mid-June and signals the opening of the facility for the summer. This celebration focuses on the native garden, which is in bloom, and the newly hatching butterflies. There is a plant sale, wine tasting, and chamber music concert. In 2007, board member and local

winery owner John Bradley also organized a 5K Walk/10K Run through scenic Elkton as part of the celebration, an element which was well-received and will likely be made annual.

The second celebration is Fort Umpqua Days, signaling the end of the summer. Fort Umpqua Days has been held in Elkton for many years during Labor Day weekend. Fort Umpqua Days includes a parade, vendor booths, contests, music, and a combined outdoor church service, with representation from both local churches. The ECEC Butterfly Pavilion also releases its butterflies during the celebration. The highlight of the event, however, is the "Echoes of the Umpqua" community pageant. While the pageant theme varies slightly each year, it always focuses on some aspect of Elkton history. Approximately 100 community members are involved in the writing and production of the pageant.

As well as hosting these celebrations, ECEC has also been host to several weddings in the past few years. ECEC's volunteer staff has expanded to include a wedding and event planner, Carol Johnston. Because all of the planning services are volunteer and weddings make use of resources that are already in existence, there is almost no overhead. As well as providing a lovely location for weddings, this new business is providing the center with some income.

### *Changes at ECEC*

ECEC has changed considerably since its inception in 1999, both in its governance and its focus. The project started with a three-person board as a solely or at least mostly educational venture. Now it has a seven-person board, as well as a staff of volunteer coordinators (several of whom are also board members). The board has come up with a ten-year plan, published on the ECEC website, which is divided into four sections: education and culture, environment, enterprise, and funding. The goals listed are divided fairly evenly among these four priorities.<sup>12</sup> As the center took on more and more projects, Carol says, it became clear that other sources of funding were going to be needed—she could not fund everything. So there has been some recent emphasis on money-making ventures, while still balancing the educational and community needs ECEC was created to address. Tellingly, the mission statement created by the original three-member board in 1999 has not changed. The center is still, as always, dedicated to intergenerational community in the areas of education, environment, and enterprise. The website reads: "Our programs are limited only by the imaginations of our community members. Their enthusiasm has generated programs far beyond the initial dream for ECEC."<sup>13</sup>

In order to keep up with the expansion in programs at ECEC, a new building is currently being built on the site. Partially funded by private foundation grants, the building will include a larger library space, a larger community meeting space, and a licensed commercial kitchen, which will be available for community members to rent out for commercial cooking (for example, making jams or baked goods to sell at holiday fairs). The purpose of the new building is two-fold: first, it will provide much needed space for programs ECEC is already running or hoping to start; and second, it will provide another possible source of income for ECEC through facilities rental.

Along with the new building, Carol and the board are thinking about structural changes necessary to keep ECEC running. The two biggest considerations are creating a stable revenue stream to support the center and hiring a paid director to coordinate ECEC's many programs, manage the finances, and apply for further grant support. Carol says that she believes ECEC programs need to bring in about \$30,000 per year to make the effort sustainable.<sup>14</sup> This would

not pay for all of the programs, but would work in combination with the trust she has set up to fund the student educational program and possible other revenue from grants. I will discuss the transitions ECEC is facing and my recommendation for how they should address them at greater length in Chapter 4.

### ***ECEC and the Elkton Community***

When asked about what ECEC has added to the community, Elkton residents have many answers. The faculty and staff at the high school often mention the teen employment program as being especially beneficial. Teens who are or have been employed by ECEC share this enthusiasm for the program. Employing twelve students per summer makes a huge difference in a town where the high school is made up of less than 60 students total, and the student employees at ECEC are exposed to more, given more responsibility, and able to learn more than they would in many of the jobs that might otherwise be available to them.

Another way in which ECEC clearly serves a need in the Elkton community is with the library. As there is no local county library branch, the ECEC library serves as not only a source for reading materials, but also a convenient location to pick up and drop off county library books. This service is particularly important for residents who do not have reliable transportation. Though its hours are very limited, the ECEC library has a dedicated client base.

A third element of ECEC for which the community is grateful, and expects to be more so in the future when the new building is completed, is the provision of group meeting space. ECEC hosts or has hosted groups ranging from the senior group to the book club to the local Weight Watchers. There are a few other community meeting spaces in Elkton—most notably the schools and the Masonic lodge—but there are not many, and they do not always serve the needs of all of the groups who would like to use them, nor are they always available. There are no commercial kitchens locally available to rent, nor are there any other venues equipped with sound systems.

The hosting of annual events like Fort Umpqua Days is another way in which ECEC serves the Elkton community. Before ECEC's construction, Fort Umpqua Days was held in downtown Elkton and at the high school. Neither of these venues wanted to keep hosting the celebration, however, due to insurance concerns, space considerations, and lack of a volunteer base for set-up and clean-up. When ECEC began hosting the event, these problems were solved.

Clearly, some of ECEC's projects are not directed towards the local community, but rather towards tourists. The native plant garden and butterfly pavilion, for example, are envisioned as a draw to tourists and outside groups. However, these projects provide something to the local community as well as to tourists, even if it is not immediately clear. The native tree park provides a convenient place for community members to exercise (the path through the park is exactly .2 miles, so walkers and joggers can track their progress in a town where there is no school track), as well as a site for local students to identify native plants. The butterfly pavilion also provides an arena for scientific education for local students, as well as being integral to the student employment program.

ECEC strives to balance its programs between those serving the local community and those drawing people from the surrounding area. Often, the same program can serve both purposes. The local community uses the facilities for many different purposes, and the center does all it can to fill local needs as they arise.

## ***Challenges for ECEC***

As proud as Carol and the other contributors to ECEC are of the work they have done and the center they have created over the past eight years, everyone to whom I talked about ECEC spoke with some trepidation about the future. Everyone felt that there would have to be changes in the way ECEC is managed and funded in order for the center to be successful long term. Though every person did not mention every issue, the following challenges facing ECEC were brought up by one or more of people to whom I spoke:

### ***Funding***

Like any non-profit, ECEC is concerned about funding. To begin with, the center was funded completely by Carol, who donated the land and buildings, paid Yvonne's coordinator salary, and took personal responsibility for many of the other costs incurred in setting up the center's early programs, including completely funding the student employment program. ECEC began to apply for grant funding for its programs, as well as solicit in-kind and labor donations, when they began the native tree and plant project. However, this funding has always been limited and has generally been put towards buildings and infrastructure, rather than operational costs. ECEC has depended solely on private foundations, including the Ford Family Foundation, the C. Giles Hunt Charitable Trust, the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation, and the Meyer Memorial Trust. No county, state, or federal dollars have been contributed to ECEC to this point.

ECEC has slowly begun to add money-making programs to its roster, including the gift shop, facilities rentals (particularly weddings), and an espresso stand. However, none of these programs generates significant revenue—Carol estimates that most of the programs make about \$1,000 annually each.<sup>15</sup> There have been issues with these funding streams, too, as the individuals who run each of these elements of the center often believe that the revenue they generate should go back into their particular programs, rather than supporting the center at large.

The current rate of expenditure at ECEC is not sustainable without new sources of income. In her 70s, Carol points out that she will not be around to provide funding for ECEC projects forever. She has set up a trust, she says, to ensure that the student employment program will remain funded, and that the land will be available, but beyond that, ECEC will need to become self-sustaining, and/or find other long-term contributors if its programs are to remain running and growing into the future.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Overextension***

Some ECEC volunteers and board members feel that the center is overextended, with too many programs running simultaneously, some of which are not completely in keeping with the original mission. When asked if ECEC has grown too fast, Carol replies that it probably has, but adds that everything she has read indicates that in a non-profit you grow or you die. She also says that she is dedicated to providing a way for local people to bring their own ideas to fruition whenever possible, as it increases community involvement and is a way to ensure that ECEC is providing programs for which Elkton actually has a need. One example she gives of this is the weekly senior group ECEC now hosts, which is self-sustaining and does not create any extra labor for existing ECEC volunteers, but does use the ECEC meeting space. Having the group has been great, Carol says, but has also opened up a whole other avenue of possibilities for services

ECEC might provide, including basic medical services (perhaps a weekly county nurse visit) and a cooking and staging location for Meals on Wheels.<sup>17</sup>

Board member John Bradley has slightly different feelings about ECEC's growth. He says that it is essential that ECEC develop a plan and stick to that plan, and stop adding new programs every time a new idea presents itself. John says that his priority is perfecting and fine tuning ECEC's current programs, then deciding if any of them should be discontinued and new programs started.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Management***

In ECEC's first years, having a paid coordinator was not successful, due to the strain it put on the budget. However, the center and its programs have grown exponentially since the pre-school moved out, and the need for a paid coordinator is once again a topic of discussion for ECEC volunteers and board members. Things that increase the financial viability of ECEC, including facilities rentals and grant applications, also increase the strain on volunteers, many of whom do not have the skill sets needed for this type of work, are uninterested in doing it, or are simply already too busy. In conversation about grant possibilities, Carol freely admits that ECEC has likely not tapped all possible grant sources, due for the most part to the lack of someone available to research grant opportunities and write applications.

Aside from the need for someone on ECEC's staff to manage funding sources, a coordinator would also be very useful simply to oversee ECEC's many activities and serve as a liaison between the volunteers that coordinate the individual programs. Carol likens the current system, where each program has its own volunteer coordinator and there is nobody coordinating the coordinators, to herding cats. This need for a coordinator will only increase next year, as Amy plans to move from Elkton and resign her position as the program coordinator for the student program.

### ***Interaction with Local Schools***

When asked about her disappointments in how ECEC has grown and changed, Carol says that the lack of interaction between ECEC and the local schools is her biggest disappointment.<sup>19</sup> Though collaborations between ECEC and the schools, including building a track at ECEC for track and field competitions, have been discussed, most of the plans have not come to fruition. When asked why she thinks this might be, Carol says that she thinks it has to do with the transient nature of Elkton's teachers, who often only stay at the schools for a few years, and with the demands put on them by decreases in school staff and increasingly stringent state teaching requirements. Amy says that ECEC's interactions with the schools have been gradually improving, and cites the use of the native plant and tree garden by vocational agriculture students in the high school and science students in the grade school as an example of how the schools are beginning to use ECEC's facilities. Still, both Carol and John Bradley are disappointed with how slowly joint projects with the school have come about, and how often discussions have fizzled. John says he would like to see the school taking more advantage of the resources available to them at ECEC, including plant and tree identification, the greenhouse, and eventually the Fort Umpqua replica. He would also like to see participation from other schools in the area, and envisions ECEC as a field trip destination.<sup>20</sup>

The concerns discussed above are the biggest ones mentioned to me by the Elkton residents I interviewed who are involved in ECEC, and are also the biggest ones I noticed while observing the center's operations. In Chapter 3, I will discuss similar community projects to ECEC and how they have overcome these challenges; then in Chapter 4 I will make recommendations for how ECEC might address these problems in the future.

**Footnotes:**

7 Carol Beckley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007.

8 Carol Beckley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007.

9 Wilma Llewellyn, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton Oregon June 6, 2007.

10 Amy Smith, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007.

11 Elkton Community Education Center, "Fort Umpqua,"

<http://www.elktoncommunityeducationcenter.org/pages/INDEX/2index.htm>, accessed November 9, 2007.

12 Elkton Community Education Center, "The ECEC Plan," <http://www.elktoncommunityeducationcenter.org/>.

13 Ibid.

14 Carol Beckley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007.

15 Carol Beckley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 John Bradley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 6, 2007.

19 Carol Beckley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007.

20 John Bradley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 6, 2007.

## Chapter 3: Case Studies

Elkton is far from the only community facing problems of school under-funding, lack of community space, lack of local enterprise, and reduced services. All over the country, rural towns are facing similar issues. In this chapter, I explore some of the responses other towns have had to these issues, with the hope that the successes found elsewhere can be instructive in ECEC's decision as to what path to take next.

### *EPIC: Fairfield, Vermont*

In 1989, Jean Richardson, a University of Vermont professor, formed a team of other scholars into what is now called the "EPIC Core Team." The major concern of this group was to create a means by which rural communities could be assisted in addressing their own needs. Environmental Programs/Partnerships in Communities (EPIC) received its first funding in 1992, via a grant from the W. Kellogg Foundation. From the beginning, EPIC has been dedicated to a community-based approach, wherein the scholars and students from EPIC assist community members in identifying and addressing their own communities' needs, using a cohesive approach that prioritizes the environment, as well as social and economic components. EPIC's approach is not concerned with measurable results, published research, or the imparting of wisdom from an outside scholar to a small town's residents. Rather, EPIC seeks to fill the role of an "invisible advisor", helping to connect local residents with the resources they need to make their own decisions about the places where they live and work.<sup>21</sup>

In 1992, Richardson contacted community leaders in Fairfield, Vermont about working with EPIC. They were responsive, and the Fairfield-EPIC collaboration lasted for a full five years. Fairfield is a town of about 1,680 in northwestern Vermont. In Fairfield, the major concern of recent years has been surviving as a town, with emphasis on dedicated local community, without complete reliance on tourism. Where in Elkton economic problems spur largely from the declining timber industry, in Fairfield they are related to the declining dairy farming industry. In 1981, there were 3,356 dairy farms in Vermont; by 2000 there were less than 2,000.<sup>22</sup> While the situation for rural residents in Vermont is not by far the worst in the nation, there are a fair share of problems, including real wages that in 2000 were at 85% of the national average,<sup>23</sup> and a lack of institutions to encourage community cohesiveness.

When Fairfield began its collaboration with EPIC, several opportunities to address Fairfield's needs were identified by local people, and EPIC provided seed grants and advice to bring these plans to fruition. The projects for which EPIC provides assistance to Fairfield included: providing seed money to start a bakery/coffee shop in central Fairfield housed in a formerly abandoned building that provides both a local meeting place and job opportunities for local women; working with local students, as well as the local zoning board and town planning commission, to write a new town plan; providing an in-depth community leadership course to members of the Fairfield community who were nominated by their fellow citizens; working with local farmers to get them involved in a heritage barn preservation project; providing seminars on holistic research management and land preservation to local farmers; helping farmers find funds for soil preservation and identify a greater number of resources available from their land; providing start-up funds for local small businesses; helping to fund a new community center; and defraying costs for local residents who want to attend courses in development, fundraising, and the creation and management of non-profit organizations.<sup>24</sup>

In her post-hoc analysis of the work EPIC did with Fairfield, Richardson makes several salient points about effective rural community building. She emphasizes the important role local women play in these types of efforts, and the need to encourage them to take leadership roles. She also thinks children are an underutilized resource in communities like Fairfield. Finally, she emphasizes the need to get senior citizens involved in these efforts, due both to their experience and capabilities and to the increased number of older people in most rural communities in recent years. Richardson also emphasizes the need for cohesive community programs, rather than single-issue efforts, in order to create lasting changes in communities. The strength of a program like EPIC, as she sees it, is that it is able to provide important funds and expertise while still depending on those who actually live in the community to decide what issues to address and how to address them.<sup>25</sup>

Though there was emphasis in Fairfield on environmentally sustainable farming practices that does not translate to the work ECEC is doing, the Fairfield-EPIC collaboration shared many goals with ECEC. The need for community public space, the inclusion of and education of local children, and the emphasis on the talents and needs of local retirees are among their similarities. The most important difference between the two projects is that in the case of EPIC-Fairfield, the funding came first, via EPIC, and then Fairfield community members identified opportunities to use it to better their community. In Elkton, community members have been very active in suggesting new programs for ECEC, but funding sources to support these programs have rarely been identified.

### ***ACEnet: Appalachian Ohio***

In 1985, a small group of community members in Athens, Ohio formed the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet). ACEnet's focus is providing support to small local businesses in southeastern Ohio, particularly those operated by rural, low-income residents. ACEnet's program is built on business training for youth and adults and the promotion of cooperation and resource sharing among area businesses. ACEnet does not focus its efforts on a single rural community, but rather on a network of interrelated communities in 29 counties in Appalachian Ohio.

Among ACEnet's services are space and facility rental, small business loans, business training and consulting, assistance with marketing and labeling, and the creation of a support network for small businesses in the region. ACEnet focuses on businesses in the food, arts, agriculture, and wood sectors. It has facilities in Athens and Nelsonville.

ACEnet's programs are primarily grant funded, with support from both regional and national public and private organizations. ACEnet does charge for most of its services, but is able to charge far below market rate in most cases. Their mission statement says that they "build the capacity of Appalachian communities to network, work together, and innovate to create a dynamic sustainable regional economy with opportunities for all."<sup>26</sup>

ACEnet has important differences from both ECEC and the EPIC program. To begin, the focus is entirely enterprise, with no environmental or social components (though there is an emphasis on locally produced products and the use of local natural resources). Secondly, ACEnet dedicates itself not to specific town, but an entire region. However, ACEnet does share some of the same goals as ECEC and EPIC, particularly having to do with business education for students

(ECEC) and building local businesses to strengthen community (EPIC). ACEnet also shares ECEC's dedication to promoting local artists and artisan food producers.

### ***Rural Enterprise Community: Sunny Wolf CRT, Josephine County, Oregon***

In 1993, the Community Empowerment Program was enacted into law. The program, run through the USDA, asked for ten-year comprehensive strategic plan applications from impoverished rural communities. Upon review of these applications, Empowerment Zones (EZ) and Enterprise Communities (EC) were chosen. In December, 1994, the first three Rural Empowerment Zones and 30 Rural Enterprise Communities were named. The Empowerment Zones received block grants of \$40 million and the Enterprise Communities block grants of just under \$3 million. Since 1994, there have been two more rounds of applications for Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community status, with increasing numbers of EZs and ECs named and more (albeit smaller than the first round) grants given.<sup>27</sup>

One of the first round Rural Enterprise Community designees was Josephine County, in southwestern Oregon. The Josephine County EC is divided into two geographic areas, called Community Response Teams (CRTs), Wolf Creek and Illinois Valley. The Wolf Creek CRT serves the communities of Sunny Valley, Wolf Creek, and Galice in northern Josephine County, the Illinois Valley CRT works with residents of Cave Junction, Selma, O'Brien, Takilma, Kerby and the rest of the unincorporated areas in the Illinois Valley in southern Josephine County. The population of entire area totals 62,649, with most of the incorporated towns having 1,500 or fewer residents. Poverty is high in the area, with many of the same timber-dependent economic stressors found in Elkton. Average individual annual income in the area was only \$8,270 in 2003.<sup>28</sup>

The Josephine County CRTs are directed entirely by local residents, with no input from the Josephine County Commissioners, who elected not to be involved in EC decision-making. For the sake of brevity, only one of the Josephine County CRTs, the Sunny Wolf CRT, will be discussed in depth here. The Sunny Wolf CRT lists some of its projects as follows: formation of three small businesses; development of a resident-run business micro-loan program; creation of a half-acre interpretive tourist park; repairs to the Harkness Irrigation Ditch, which provides water to Sunny Valley farmers and ranchers; publication of a Sunny Wolf business and skills directory; establishment of a computer lab in the Three Rivers School District; establishment of community education courses on computer skills; provision of a summer job training program for low-income youth; construction of a Sunny Valley fire station; repairs on 18 low-income housing units; renovations to the Wolf Creek Civic Center; development of a Wolf Creek Teen Center; centralization of social services to low-income residents, including Aid to Families with Dependent Children (food stamps and child care), the State Employment Service, Probation and Parole, Tax Assistance, and the Josephine County Health Department (immunizations, county health nurse visits, WIC), so that community members no longer have to travel to receive services; and publication of a monthly area newsletter.<sup>29</sup>

The Sunny Wolf CRT reported in their annual report in 2003 that for every dollar in block grant funds spent, they were able to leverage \$11 in additional funding and in-kind donations. They operated with an almost entirely volunteer staff, including a volunteer Executive Director, and divided their focus between running existing programs (including the teen center and annual several community events) and developing new programs, including the construction of new

public library on donated land. Some programs, such as a public transportation program, were deemed not to serve the communities needs in a cost-effective manner and discontinued.<sup>30</sup>

There are many similarities between the needs identified by the Sunny Wolf CRT and ECEC. The communities they serve are ecologically and demographically similar, though Elkton is smaller than the area served by Sunny Wolf CRT, and many of the projects Sunny Wolf CRT has taken on are ones ECEC has also taken on, or plans to in the future. The major difference, again, is funding. Though Sunny Wolf CRT has drawn on a lot of local and private funding sources since they were awarded their block grant, much of that money would have been difficult to obtain were they not first able to get things started with the federal dollars.

### *Lessons for ECEC*

ECEC can take several lessons from the experiences of the other community projects discussed above. Perhaps the most important thing to learn is that all three projects were successful in part because they were able to accurately gauge the needs of the local community. In the case of EPIC and the Enterprise Community, these needs were identified by community members themselves, working in conjunction with outside experts. In the case of the ACEnet project, the locals and the experts were one in the same. These approaches speak to the need of these types of projects to rely on local community members for their expertise knowledge of community needs.

Another lesson ECEC can learn from the other projects mentioned in this chapter is to identify funding sources early on. EPIC and the Enterprise Community were both funded before any projects began. Having start-up funding of this sort allowed for both a multi-pronged approach to programming from the outset and for priorities to be formed based on needs, rather than available funding. Obviously, it is too late for ECEC to secure funding before beginning projects, but it can take from these other projects the need to identify and pursue both government and private funding sources.

On a related note, two of these successful projects, ACEnet and EPIC, focus all or part of their efforts on financially sustainable business projects. They recognize from the outset that in order to keep serving their communities they have to draw in income. In the case of ACEnet, financially sustainable businesses make up the entirety of the service provided. While this method is not transferable to ECEC's situation, EPIC's focus on businesses as part of its overall plan is.

Another lesson ECEC can learn from these successful projects, particularly EPIC, is to make the most of the talents of women, children, and senior citizens—all groups that are traditionally marginalized in community decision-making. ECEC has a good start on this, with the majority of its board and volunteer staff comprised of women and/or senior citizens and the use of students as the bulk of its workforce. Given the examples discussed in this chapter, particularly EPIC, it would be advisable for ECEC to continue this practice.

Finally, these case studies show the importance of considering not just local interests, but regional ones, when designing programs. Because the populations of the towns in question are so small, there is sometimes not enough interest for many programs to continue in just one town. Both ACEnet and the Enterprise Community base their priorities not on the interests of one town, but of an entire region, and this is essential to their success. As ECEC grows, the board has

begun discussing how the resources available there can be used not just by Elkton residents, but by other area residents. So far the needs of the area have not been a priority, and they will need to be in the future in order for ECEC to continue growing.

In the next chapter, I will examine the challenges currently faced by ECEC and suggest ways in which the center might best respond to these challenges. All three of the cases presented here are farther along in their history than ECEC, and all three of them have or had much more significant financial support than ECEC. I will draw back on these examples for ideas for new funding possibilities and organizational structures.

**Footnotes:**

21 Richardson, Jean, *Partnerships in Communities: Reweaving the Fabric of Rural America* (Washington D.C., Island Press, 2000), 45-47.

22 Ibid, 239.

23 Ibid, 239.

24 Ibid, 243-244.

25 Ibid, 252.

26 ACEnet, "Mission and Vision," <http://www.acenetworks.org/about/index.php?page=136>.

27 USDA, "Rural Community Empowerment Program," <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/index.html>.

28 USDA, "Josephine County EC," <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/ezec/or/josephine.html>.

29 Sunny Wolf CRT, "Community Projects," <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ranch/4206/page6.html>.

30 USDA, "2003 Annual Report Executive Summary: Josephine County Enterprise Community," [http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/03\\_Exec\\_Summaries/josephine.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/03_Exec_Summaries/josephine.html).

## Chapter 4: ECEC Moving Forward

ECEC is not merely a hobby project for Carol and the other volunteers. The center provides services to the Elkton community that are not provided elsewhere—including teen employment, a library, public meeting space, and hosting for public events and celebrations. The provision of these services helps to address the problems in Elkton identified in Chapter 2. As the center continues to grow, they hope to add more community service programs. However, serving the community is not ECEC's only mission, and as they move forward, Carol and the board members are pressed to balance the needs of the community that have already been identified with regional needs and an income producing element.

I suggest that ECEC take this opportunity to learn from the case studies in the previous chapter. Specifically, ECEC should continue to make good use of the expertise of senior citizens, women, and students, and to listen to local residents when they identify community needs. Beyond that, though, ECEC also needs to focus more on broadening its appeal to not only the Elkton community, but the whole area. Most of all, ECEC must work on identifying and aggressively pursuing funding for its programs.

What follows are my specific recommendations for how ECEC should address the issues of funding, overextension, management, and interaction with local schools. These suggestions are informed by the experiences in the case studies, as well as the successes and failures experienced by ECEC itself so far. My recommendations are listed in order of importance—I suggest that the ECEC board and director focus first on finding new sources of funding, then address changing their programs and management, and finally look for ways to increase the interaction between the center and the local schools.

### *Recommendations*

#### *Funding*

The single biggest challenge facing ECEC is the need for sustainable funding. In part, the lack of funding ECEC is facing is due to the center's failure to exploit all possible grant sources. To date, ECEC's grant applications have been limited to foundations, with no appeals to government funding sources at the state or federal levels. This is in stark contrast to the case studies presented in the previous chapter, all of which depended on government funding for most or all of their operating budgets, and were successful in large part due to that funding. I recommend ECEC consider applying to the following sources for continued funding:

- Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI): This program provides matching funds to non-profit organizations, low-income communities, or tribes to "develop or increase their capacity to undertake projects in the areas of housing, community facilities, and community and economic development in rural areas."<sup>31</sup> Because this is a matching fund program, funds could be granted to expand programs Carol's trust is already funding, such as the student employment program, or the construction of the new multi-purpose building.
- Community Facilities Loans and Grants: The USDA has funds available for the construction and maintenance of community facilities in impoverished rural areas. These are not matching funds, but the progress that has been made with regards to community

facilities at ECEC already would likely put an application for further funds from the USDA in a positive light.<sup>32</sup>

- Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities Program: Currently, the USDA is not designating new rural empowerment zones and enterprise communities. However, if this program is re-funded by Congress in the next few years, which is not unlikely, ECEC should look into partnership with other area organizations and city governments and apply for designation as a rural enterprise community.<sup>33</sup>
- Environmental Education Grants: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a grant program that "supports environmental education projects that enhance the public's awareness, knowledge, and skills to help people make informed decisions that affect environmental quality." It is quite possible that the work ECEC does to preserve native Oregon tree and plant species and teach the public about them could qualify for this type of grant.<sup>34</sup>
- Save America's Treasures Program: Run through the National Park Service, the Save America's Treasures program gives grants to organizations preserving important cultural and historic artifacts. The Fort Umpqua replica project would be an excellent candidate for this type of funding.<sup>35</sup>
- Oregon Community Development Block Grant Program: This program gives block grants to rural communities for a variety of projects, including building and maintaining low-income housing and public works projects. One of the goals of the program is to fund "facilities that generally provide services to the general community and may have a greater possibility of generating loan repayment revenue: Community Centers, Food Banks, Adult Learning Centers, Fire Stations, Libraries."<sup>36</sup> This program requires 15% local matching, and is for communities, rather than non-profit organizations, so ECEC would need to partner with the city of Elkton to apply for these funds.

In addition to exploring state and federal funding sources, ECEC should continue to request support from the organizations that have supported them in the past, particularly the Ford Family Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, the Pew Foundation, and the C. Giles Hunt Charitable Trust.

Nearly everyone involved with ECEC to whom I spoke realized a need not only for charitable support for ECEC's programs, but for ECEC's ventures to generate income of their own. John Bradley pointed out, rightly, that the current income-generating projects, such as the gift shop and the espresso stand, are likely never going to make very much money relative to their operating costs. His answer to this is to build up the annual "big events" held by ECEC, including Blooms and Butterflies and Fort Umpqua Days, and include money-making elements in those events.<sup>37</sup> The 5K/10K race held at the most recent Blooms and Butterflies is one example of this type of venture. This is exactly the right approach. With this approach, ECEC is able to tap sources of funding outside the small community it serves. In order for this to work, however, interest must be built in these events outside Elkton. This shift from a local focus to a regional one has proved successful for some of the case studies as well, particularly ACEnet. When I discussed this with Wilma Llewellyn, she showed me some of the work she has been doing to raise awareness of ECEC's programs and events outside Elkton, including advertisements in area newspapers and a recently re-launched website. I sympathize with her wanting to harness ideas and enthusiasm when and where they come about, it is simply not

possible for ECEC to be everything to everyone. I agree with John Bradley's feeling that the best course for ECEC at this point is to refine current programs, then decide if new programs are feasible. However, I would take this one step further and begin retiring non-essential programs now. It is, of course, very difficult to do this, as there are at least a few people invested in every program at ECEC, but I believe it is essential to the healthy growth of the center. In the case of the Josephine County Enterprise Community, a large number of diverse programs are sustainable due to the size of the block grant awarded. However, in cases like ACEnet, EPIC, and ECEC, the type and number of programs are limited by funds available, and it does a disservice to all of the programs to spread available resources too thin.

The best way for the ECEC board to decide which programs to keep and which to retire is to go back to the original mission statement. Programs that do not foster multi-generational interaction in the areas of education, environment, and enterprise should not be a priority for the center, at least not unless they are generating significant revenue to support the programs that are meeting the mission statement's goals. If the ECEC board feels a need to sponsor programs that do not meet the stated goals, they should discuss the value of those programs and consider amending the mission statement. For example, the mission statement makes no mention of community meeting space or services for seniors or low-income residents, yet ECEC has several programs currently running or under discussion for the future that are built around those priorities. Either the mission statement should be altered or these programs should be discontinued. ACEnet can be looked to as an example of an organization that thoughtfully limits its programs to those which meet its stated goals.

Discontinuing current programs or refusing to create new ones when community members suggest them may well alienate some people from ECEC. This is inevitable. In order to mediate problems, it is essential that there are firm guidelines by which the ECEC board decides which programs to support. It is much better to refuse an idea or retire a program on the basis of it not fitting with ECEC's mission statement than for less concrete reasons, which could be read as personal by the people invested in those programs or ideas.

I would also suggest ECEC put a temporary freeze on starting any new programs, no matter how well they fit with the organization's mission, until sources of funding are identified for the long-term support of existing endeavors. Then, when a new program is suggested, potential funding for that idea should be explored as a first step. Programs for which funding is available (for example, rural health initiatives) should be given priority over those for which there is no funding available, so long as both meet the goals stated in the mission statement.

### ***Management***

It is clear that ECEC is in need of a paid coordinator. This person should be responsible for coordinating the various activities underway, communicating with the board, raising ECEC's profile in the area, and, perhaps most importantly, identifying potential funding sources and writing grant applications. However, I do not think ECEC's current budget can support such a position. The Josephine County Sunny Wolf Enterprise Community faced similar constraints, and, after employing a coordinator for some time, returned to a near complete reliance on volunteer labor towards the end of its funding period. However, the Sunny Wolf EC had the benefit of already having been awarded its funding and not needing a staff person to procure more grants. ECEC does not have this luxury.

To resolve this conundrum, I recommend ECEC apply to the University of Oregon's Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) program to be considered as a placement for an AmeriCorp-supported coordinator. RARE program communities are asked to contribute \$17,000 per year of the approximately \$30,000 cost of training and placing young people (generally directly post-college) in their communities.<sup>39</sup> This would cost significantly less than ECEC would spent to hire a coordinator through traditional means, and using a RARE participant to fill this position would also meet the inter-generational education goals stated in the center's mission statement.

ECEC is an excellent candidate for a RARE placement. The RARE program asks that its community applicants demonstrate the following: a clear community need for a RARE participant; a high probability of developing and implementing successful community projects, i.e. what is the project readiness; a community and organization which is supportive of the RARE placement; a qualified and committed supervisor appointed to work with the member as a mentor; valuable learning experiences identified for the member; and a clear manageable work plan.<sup>40</sup> Assuming Carol is willing to serve as the mentor for a RARE participant, ECEC easily meets these criteria.

If an AmeriCorp participant cannot be placed at ECEC, then the center should explore grant funding to pay for a coordinator. It is possible that some of the foundations on which ECEC has previously relied for support, particularly the Ford Family Foundation, would fund a coordinator. Every effort should be made to obtain outside funding for a coordinator, rather than dedicating ECEC's limited current income to paying a coordinator's salary.

If no outside funding for a coordinator can be found, I recommend ECEC not hire one in the near future. Rather, an effort should be made to find volunteers with the skills and willingness to write grant applications. Only after some new outside sources moderate the funding situation should money be spared to hire a coordinator.

### ***Interaction with Local Schools***

Local schools could definitely benefit from increased use of ECEC's resources. However, Carol and the ECEC board may be underestimating how much the schools already take advantage of ECEC. In part, this disconnect is likely due to the opposing schedules of ECEC and the schools. ECEC is open for business and full of volunteers, including Carol, mostly in the summer, when school is not in session. Between Labor Day and Memorial Day, ECEC is deserted much of the time, which both makes it less enticing as a destination for students and keeps the board and Carol somewhat ignorant of how much local teachers are actually using it. Amy reported that both grade school and high school teachers bring their classes to the native plant and tree garden for practice in species identification, something of which neither John Bradley nor Carol were aware.<sup>41</sup>

In order to best benefit students, ECEC should have more of a presence during the non-summer months. Hiring a full-time coordinator, who would work out of the ECEC campus, would help with this. The coordinator could easily interface between ECEC and the schools, which are very nearby, and would be available on-site to give tours, answer questions, and organize events for students. Given the number of new teachers in the Elkton School district (several teachers, including the high school science teacher, retired last year), it would also be a good idea for someone from ECEC's board to make a presentation to the schools' staffs detailing

the resources available there and the willingness of ECEC volunteers to work with teachers to make the best use of those resources for student education.

When I spoke to him, John Bradley mentioned that he would like to see ECEC become a field trip destination not just for Elkton students, but for students from nearby schools as well.<sup>42</sup> This is an excellent goal. A similar presentation to the one suggested above to Elkton teachers could be made to other schools nearby, or an ECEC volunteer could create a brochure detailing the resources and their availability to student groups. After the Fort Umpqua replica is completed, this type of advertising will be even more important, as the ECEC site will have multiple attractions (the local trees and plants, the butterflies in season, and the fort) to offer students.

Another arena in which ECEC should continue to try to build a relationship with local schools is its student employment program. This program has been successful in recent years, in part due to the efforts of students who have come up through the program like Amy. If resources are available, it may be beneficial to extend this program into the school year, with students giving weekend and holiday tours. If there are not enough Elkton students to staff a larger program, students from other area schools could be considered. The implementation of these ideas, however, is completely contingent on obtaining additional funding for the program.

### ***Conclusion***

The progress made by ECEC over its first years is substantial, particularly considering the limited funds and human capital that has been available. However, ECEC is currently at a point where it must either control its growth or burn itself out. The small community of Elkton cannot support the variety of programs ECEC is currently offering without help from outside sources. In order to remain successful and sustain its programs into the future, ECEC must concentrate on the following:

1. Find funding sources that will take the pressure off Carol and last into the future. These should include a combination of government and private grants and program-generated income.
2. Trim programs to just those that meet stated mission statement goals and concentrate on refining those programs before starting any new ones.
3. Hire a coordinator to work on finding and obtaining grant funding, building relationships with local schools, and coordinating existing programs. If at all possible, use the RARE/AmeriCorp program or grant funding to support this coordinator.
4. Strengthen relationships with local schools through extending existing programs into the school year and increasing communication between school personnel and ECEC volunteers and potential staff.

Given the progress ECEC has been able to make so far, I am confident that with a few changes in priorities and a greater emphasis on long-term planning, the center can be built into something that will serve both the Elkton community and the surrounding area in perpetuity. Compromises will necessarily have to be made, and it will be impossible to do everything that the people involved with the project would like to do. However, ECEC has and can continue to make a huge difference in the areas to which it commits itself and will remain an invaluable resource to local residents.

**Footnotes:**

- 31 USDA, "Rural Community Development Initiative," <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/rcdi/index.htm>.
- 32 USDA, "Community Facilities Loans and Grants," [http://ric.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_web/ric/ffd.php?rec\\_id=157&mode=show\\_reference](http://ric.nal.usda.gov/nal_web/ric/ffd.php?rec_id=157&mode=show_reference).
- 33 USDA, "Empowerment Zones Programs" [http://ric.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_web/ric/ffd.php?rec\\_id=157&mode=show\\_reference](http://ric.nal.usda.gov/nal_web/ric/ffd.php?rec_id=157&mode=show_reference).
- 34 EPA, "Environmental Education Grants," <http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants.html>.
- 35 National Park Service, "Save America's Treasures," <http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants.html>.
- 36 Oregon Community Development Division, "Community Development Block Grant Program," <http://econ.oregon.gov/ECDD/CD/CDBG/CDBG.shtml>.
- 37 John Bradley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 6, 2007.
- 39 University of Oregon, "Resource Assistance for Rural Environments," <http://rare.uoregon.edu/>.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Amy Smith, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007. Carol Beckley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 5, 2007. John Bradley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 6, 2007.
- 42 John Bradley, interviewed by Grace Mitchell, Elkton, Oregon, June 6, 2007.

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- USDA, "Josephine County EC," <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/ezec/or/josephine.html>.
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- USDA, "Rural Community Empowerment Program," <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/index.html>.

U.S. Census Bureau, "Elkton City, Oregon Fact Sheet."