



Community Action Solutions

March - April 2004



Hundreds of people viewed exhibits of Community Action programs at the State Capitol.

Community Action programs showcased at State Capitol

Legislators, state employees, lobbyists and visitors swarmed Community Action Program exhibits at the State Capitol during the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies' Legislative Conference.

Tabletop displays filled the 4th floor rotunda highlighting 16 different programs ranging from economic development to weatherization.

Meanwhile, Community Action staffers converged on the offices of state lawmakers to provide them with information about Community Action.

David Hopper, board member, Deep Fork Community Action, was busy handing out packets of peanuts at the Senior Nutrition Program booth. A sticker on each packet said: "Community Action Agencies save Oklahoma millions of dollars by taking care of the elderly for peanuts."

Even the luncheon provided to lawmakers and staff carried the message of the economic impact of Community Action on the state.

Affixed to the top of each food container was the message: "Oklahoma Community Action Agencies employ 3,695 Oklahomans and spend \$177 million locally.

The exhibits featured a variety of tools to help illustrate Community Action programs.

A blower door was set up at the weatherization exhibit.

The substance abuse exhibit featured a model built by their consumers to illustrate the options faced: cover up, lock up or sober up.

Legislators stopped by to chat between committee meetings.

The event capped the three-day conference which featured training sessions for Community Action staffers and the annual awards luncheon.

Derrick Span speaks at Legislative Conference

Derrick Span, National President of the Community Action Partnership, brought his anti-poverty message to Oklahoma when speaking at the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies' Legislative Conference.

"Poverty is nobody's fault, but everybody's fight," he declared.

Recalling President Lyndon Johnson's support for the Economic Opportunity Act, Span said the commitment made yesterday is still unfulfilled today.

"Forty years later Americans still live in poverty."

He said Americans are suffering.

"Elderly still have to decide between eating or feeling better," he added.

He called for a White House Conference on American poverty to forge a new national poverty agenda.

Span's visit to Oklahoma is part of a 37 city national tour designed to draw Americans to the "No Room for Poverty" national rally on Sept. 4 in Washington, D.C.



Community Action Partnership national president Derrick Span issues a call for Oklahomans to attend the No Room for Poverty national rally in Washington, D.C.



Community Action Day at the Capitol



This is one of three 9-foot high banners erected in the Capitol rotunda.



OKACAA's exhibit in the State Capitol rotunda featured photos illustrating a variety of programs, statistical information and a map of the service areas for the Community Action Agencies.



State Representative Ray McCarter picked up information on the Foster Grandparents Program from Mynan Hutto (r) and Karen Nichols from Delta Community Action Foundation.



Robert Meador from Community Action Development Corporation staffed the weatherization booth.



Ann Wilson from KI BOIS Community Action Foundation staffed the Developmental Disabilities program table.



Lisa Williams from Cookson Hills Community Action discussed tax return preparation assistance programs provided by Community Action Agencies. Nine agencies participating in the program have helped 2,071 clients get nearly \$3 million in refunds.



Homebuyer Education coordinator Tricia Auberle answers questions about the program for a pair of visitors to the Oklahoma Homebuyer Education Association booth.



Housing programs ranging from self-help single family construction to multifamily projects were described at the Housing table. Answering questions were Judy Smith from Community Action Development Corporation and Chris Barnett from United Community Action Program.



Collaborative programs in support of children and families were explained by Dian Hobbs and Pat Gower from Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation.



The Road to Work program -- providing transportation to jobs -- was featured at the transit table staffed by Roger Bartlett and Charla Sloan from KI BOIS Community Action Foundation.



Deep Fork Community Action Foundation board member David Hopper passed out bags of peanuts at the Senior Nutrition table.



Krista Reyes from Community Action Development Corporation provided information on youth programs.



Gwen McClung and Debbie Anderson from the Behavioral Services program operated by Opportunities, Inc. used a consumer constructed model to display options facing substance abusers.



The Head Start program display attracted a large number of visitors.



Capitol visitors learn about meal programs while visiting the Adult and Child Food Program display.



Information on topics ranging from business loans to Individual Development Accounts was available at the Economic Development display.



The Emergency Assistance display highlighted how Community Action Agencies assist clients with clothing, food and utility payments.

Lawmakers, board members & Community Action supporters honored during awards luncheon



State Representative Randall Erwin (l) was recognized as a Legislator of the Year. Bob Yandell, executive director, Little Dixie Community Action Agency participated in the presentation.



OKACAA President Odell Gunter (l) presents a Legislator of the Year award to State Senator Kenneth Corn as Cookson Hills Community Action executive director Helen James and board member Cleon Harrell look on.



Helen James, executive director, Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation, presents a Legislator of the Year award to State Representative Jim Wilson.



Dr. Sissy Osteen, assistant professor, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, was presented a Friend of Community Action award in recognition of her leadership in the Oklahoma Homebuyer Education Association by Odell Gunter, president, OKACAA.



Washita Valley Community Action Council board members Jack Porter (r) and Stacey R. Smith were presented Friends of Community Action awards by Odell Gunter, OKACAA president, (l) as Charlotte Key, Washita Valley Community Action executive director, looks on.



Michael E. Jones, (l) executive director, OKACAA, presents a Friend of Community Action award to Stephen Weiss, senior fiscal policy analysis, Oklahoma House of Representatives, as OKACAA President Odell Gunter looks on.



Displaying their plaques are, from left, Dave Ellison, Laura Corff and Randy Heiser. (Photo provided by Oklahoma Transit Association)

Cimarron named 2003 Transit System of the Year

Cimarron Public Transit System, a program of United Community Action Program, has been named the 2003 Public Transit System of the Year by the Oklahoma Transit Association.

In connection with the award, Dave Ellison, director of Cimarron Public Transit, was named the 2003 Public Transit Manager of the Year.

At the ceremony, Ellison acknowl-

edged route supervisors Laura Corff, of the Ponca City office, and Randy Heiser, of the Pawnee office, and thanked them for their dedication and hard work to make the award possible.

Also, Roger Bartlett of KI BOIS Area Transit System in Stigler received the first ever President's Award for exceptional service and dedication to the transit community.

Economic Development Division provides financial help and training for urban core businesses

The Economic Development Division of Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties is helping create jobs in the urban core of the city through a series of business development and self-sufficiency enhancement programs.

Bonnie Schwartz, economic development director, oversees a revolving loan program that is coupled with a matched savings account program, small business training workshops and technical assistance to support new and existing businesses in the Enterprise Community (EC), an area targeted for economic development.

“The Economic Development Division is a great support for those saving toward business start-up,” Schwartz noted. “The division not only offers a revolving loan fund that can be coupled with IDA (Individual Development Accounts), but also offers small business training and assistance with business plan development.”

The community action agency partners with local financial institutions to provide loans. Since taking over the program in 1996, the agency has assisted 34 businesses with loans totaling nearly \$5.9 million. Of that, nearly \$3.9 million came from private sources with the balance from Enterprise Community funds. The loans to 14 businesses totaling about \$2.4 million have been fully repaid, she said.

The loans have helped fund start-up or expansion of a whole array of small businesses including restaurants, a construction company, tire store, waste management company and pottery store, Schwartz explained. Over 200 jobs have been created or retained.

To qualify to apply for a loan, the business must be located in the EC,

or the owner or manager of the business must be a resident of the EC.

The agency also partners with MetroTech and the South Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce to sponsor small business training classes. The classes meet two evenings weekly for five weeks. Speakers cover basic business topics including financing, marketing and



Bonnie Schwartz, Economic Development Division director, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, visits with First Star, Inc. waste hauling service company owners Michael Alexander (left) and Tyrone Breckenridge.

Loan helps waste business expand

An \$85,000 loan from the revolving loan fund administered by the Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties helped First Star, Inc. expand its waste management business.

Owners Mike Alexander and Tyrone Breckenridge started their company a decade ago.

“When we started out, we did it all,” recalled Alexander. “For the first two years we didn’t draw a salary. Every penny went back into the business,” he added.

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legal issues. Since July 1996, 975 individuals have graduated from the small business classes and workshops.

Since the loans require borrowers to provide part of the financing, the agency also coordinates an IDA program.

The IDA program, explained Twyla Gable, is a tool to help working families with low-to-moderate income move toward self-sufficiency by offering a \$2 match (up to \$4000) on each \$1 saved (up to \$2000) for business start-up or expansion, higher education, or a first home purchase.

One-half of the match is provided by the federal government. Bank of Oklahoma, First Commercial Bank, MidFirst Bank, and the Oklahoma City Community Foundation are non-federal contributors who provide the other half of the match.

She noted that one lady recently used funds from her IDA account to expand her home daycare by purchasing commercial playground equipment.

There have been 75 participants enroll in the program with the potential of enrolling up to 100 more over the next two years. Of those who have enrolled, approximately 16% stated business start-up or expansion as their goal.



This commercial playground equipment was purchased with funds saved through the Individual Development Account program to expand a child care center.

Loan

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The pair worked second jobs to pay the bills while slowly building their business.

Since struggling during the early years, the company has grown to 17 employees, five trucks and 300 containers. Its clients include government agencies, demolition companies, restaurants, apartment complexes, homeowners and others.

The revolving loan fund has now been paid back.

"They've been wonderful to work with," said Bonnie Schwartz, economic development director, for the Community Action Agency.

The two owners have facing desks in the large open office. They credit open communications to their success.

"We're in this together," said Breckenridge

The pair recall one of the company's biggest challenges was to help remove the thousands of tons of debris left in the wake of the May 3, 1999 tornado that swept across the city.

"We were the only local waste hauler to secure a contract with FEMA," Alexander said.

Breckenridge pointed out that waste disposal has become very complex with stringent regulations governing the disposal of hazardous wastes.

"We've learned a lot from experience," he added.

Alexander and Breckenridge have a shared vision to impact the community in a positive way plus the commitment to provide timely and professional services.

Southwest Oklahoma
Community Action Group has a
new web site at:
www.geocities.com/socag2004

Cafe ownership becomes a reality with help from Community Action

Keith and Heather Paul are into historic restoration and food. With help from the Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, they combined their passions to purchase Cheever's -- a cafe and wine bar.

Housed in a building constructed in 1907, the pair acquired the business four years ago with Community Action helping arrange financing.

"No other way we could have done this without them believing in Cheever's," Heather said.

Since purchasing the business, Heather said they have been upgrading equipment and making other changes.

She described the food as American Southwest cuisine.

The building, located at 2409 N. Hudson in Oklahoma City, housed a florist business for many years. The former flower cooler -- which was installed in 1920 -- now serves as a wine cooler.

Focusing on the community, the pair have hired their employees from the neighborhood. Most could walk to work, Heather noted.

In a difficult industry where many

restaurants fail within two years, Heather said they are building their business on customer service.

Since helping the pair acquire the business, Community Action Economic Development Director Bonnie Schwartz has kept in touch.

"She's been super kind and helpful," Heather said.



Keith and Heather Paul are pictured outside Cheever's which they purchased four years ago with help from Community Action.

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency to host Group Workcamp in July

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency is lining up homes that need repair in preparation for a Group Workcamp scheduled for July 18-24 in Delaware County.

The Colorado-based Group Workcamp mobilizes hundreds of teens and adult advisors who converge on a community repair homes of senior citizens and low-income residents.

The volunteers will stay in the Jay High School during the Workcamp. Over 400 have already signed on to help.

There is no cost to homeowners.

The teens typically repair roofs and porches, build wheelchair ramps, and paint the interior and exteriors of the selected homes.

About 40 houses have already been targeted for repair and more are being evaluated.

The teens along with adult leaders each pay for the opportunity to participate in the weeklong event. Northeast and other local community groups are raising funds to purchase needed supplies.

This is the second Group Workcamp sponsored by Northeast.

KI BOIS Area Transit System to get \$650,000 grant

KI BOIS Area Transit System (KATS) is slated to receive a \$650,000 transportation appropriations grant to build a maintenance and training facility in Stigler.

KATS Director Charla Sloan said the current maintenance facility is much too small to accommodate the needs.

With 115 vehicles and still growing, KATS is the largest rural transit system in Oklahoma. It serves Adair, Cherokee, Haskell, Latimer, LeFlore,

McIntosh, Pittsburg and Sequoyah counties.

Mechanics Ron Davis, Jim Oliver and Danny Upton currently have only two small bays that won't even hold the 25-foot buses.

"Sometimes we have to crawl through the door and go out the back to get to the other side," said Davis.

A low ceiling doesn't allow enough room for a lift so they have to use a portable jack.

While the money is not expected until summer, Sloan has begun looking for property and will be working with an architect on the facility design.

Sloan said she expects a state-of-the-art facility.

That's good news for the mechanics.

"We'll be able to do our own wheel alignments and other things we've been having to farm out because we couldn't lift the buses high enough," said Davis.

In addition to the daily mechanical problems the mechanics must deal with, they also perform routine maintenance on each bus every 15,000 miles.

Drivers will also be able to get training in the new facility, Sloan said. Because of the limited space, they now must travel to different areas to train, she explained.



KATS Director Charla Sloan

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Looking forward to moving into a new maintenance facility are, from left, Jim Oliver, Danny Upton and Ron Davis. (Photo provided by KI BOIS Community Action Foundation)

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