



Community Action Solutions

March-April 2007

Commerce & Tourism Secretary Natalie Shirley

Meets with OKACAA Board



Commerce & Tourism Secretary Natalie Shirley chats with James E. Sconzo, Executive Director, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, and Sharlotte Key, Executive Director, Washita Valley Community Action Council, during a luncheon meeting.

Natalie Shirley, the newly appointed Secretary of Commerce and Tourism, met with the board of directors during the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies' Legislative Conference.

She spent much of the meeting walking around the table talking one-on-one with the executive directors about their programs.

During the luncheon, she told about volunteering in a homeless shelter and tutoring a young woman preparing for the general equivalency diploma examination. She also spoke about the importance of the state's workforce.

A native of Blackwell, Shirley served as president and chief executive officer of ICI Mutual Insurance Group in Washington, D.C. for the past five years.

She has a law degree from the University of Oklahoma, a bachelor's degree in psychology and a bachelor's degree in political science from Oklahoma State University.

Shirley serves on the board of directors for the Oklahoma CASA Association, an organization that recruits and trains people to serve as Court Appointed Special Advocates for abused or neglected children.

OKACAA Publishes 2007 Directory and Annual Report

The Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (OKACAA) has issued the 2007 Directory and Annual Report.

The 72-page publication contains a wealth of information about member agencies.

There is contact information for key program staff along with the locations of district and program offices. Maps highlight the service areas for member agencies. Agency funding and staffing data is included.

The publication also includes:

- Information on program accomplishments for 2006.

- Short articles provided by the agencies on how families have been helped by their programs.

- Contact information for all Head Start grantees in the state.

- A list of Certified Homebuyer Education Service Providers.

- A summary of programs provided by OKACAA.

A copy of the directory and annual report is available on OKACAA's web site at: www.okacaa.org or by calling (405) 949-1495.



Sylvia Longoria manages the Taste of Grand coffee shop in downtown Frederick. The shop features specialty coffees and is becoming a popular gathering place for residents.

Downtown Coffee Shop Is CADC Community Development Project

Nestled on Main Street in downtown Frederick is the Taste of Grand - a coffee shop built by Community Action Development Corporation (CADC).

It is adjacent to The Grand - Hotel Frederick, a historic property that CADC converted into housing for senior citizens. The coffee shop offers a variety of specialty coffees along with sandwiches and snacks.

"We wanted a place for people to come downtown," explained Brent Morey, Executive Director, CADC.

One wall has a large mural painted on it. The mural features prominent citizens, a tribute to a World War II army air field located outside Frederick and the historic Ramona Theatre.

The coffee shop was originally part of the hotel's restaurant.

The renovation gave the room the look of an old time coffee/soda shop. Yet, a reading area in one corner near the front of the shop provides Internet access.

"It's good for the community. If we hadn't stepped in, it would be in ruins

-- a blight on the community," Morey added.

While renovating the room, CADC found equipping it at a reasonable cost to be a challenge.

The cost of purchasing new booth seats from a supplier was prohibitive. A local bowling alley that had closed had some seats in its break room.

"We bought them and had them restored."

The coffee shop is not only attracting local residents, but also tour groups who stop for lunch while touring the historic hotel.

"It's becoming a bit of a tourist attraction," Morey said.



With the wall mural in the background, Brent Morey relaxes in a booth at the Taste of Grand.

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Great Plains Breaks Ground for Apartment Complex

The cool, overcast morning with the threat of rain did not dampen the enthusiasm of a group of federal, state and local officials who joined Great Plains Improvement Foundation staff to break ground for the \$3.5 million Northtown Apartment complex in Fletcher on March 23.

The complex will consist of 10 three-bedroom units and 14 two-bedroom units. There will be a community building with a manager's office, community space and a computer lab on-site.

Four of the two-bedroom units are single level living for seniors.

The affordable apartments will serve individuals and families with income between 50 and 60 percent of median income for the area.

Kevin McNeely, Field Office Director, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Oklahoma City, praised the effort to provide safe, affordable housing.

"Housing and job development go hand-in-hand. Housing is important to rural communities," McNeely said.

He commented that it is a wonderful way to celebrate Oklahoma's centennial.

Great Plains Executive Director Odell Gunter noted that discussions and planning had been underway for about 18 months and construction was expected to take another year.

"It's a long journey," he said.

The complex is the first project of its type to be undertaken by Great Plains.

Partners for the project include the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, Enterprise Community Investment, Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka, Bank of Oklahoma, Town of Fletcher, Comanche County Commissioners, Mercy Housing, Ron Reid Architects and Buland Group, contractors.



Virginia Spencer, Associate Administrator; State Rep. Joe Dorman, and Odell Gunter, Executive Director, Great Plains Improvement Foundation, turn a spade of dirt during the groundbreaking for an apartment complex in Fletcher.



Kevin McNeely, HUD Field Office Director, speaks prior to the groundbreaking for the apartment complex.



Town of Fletcher Mayor Dick Herrin tells how excited the community is about the new apartment complex.

Community Action Staff Members Attend Training and Meet with Lawmakers During OKACAA Legislative Conference



Bill Havron from Great Plains Improvement Foundation (right) stops by Rep. Ryan Kiesel's office in the Capitol to visit.



Twila Kuder (left) and Mary Ann Overall from Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency practice the techniques taught in an Intermediate Excel class held during the March 26-28 conference.



J. Michael Hall from Strong Fathers-Strong Families suggests ways to involve fathers in their child's education to improve educational and social outcomes.



Sen. Judy Eason McIntyre and Cleon Harrell, Executive Director, Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation, pause for a picture in the Capitol.

Transit Scheduling Often Like Putting Together a Puzzle

Each weekday Max Clayton is faced with putting together a puzzle. Not a picture puzzle, but the schedule for about 40 vans that transport Medicaid qualified persons to appointments across the state.

Clayton is transportation supervisor for Community Action Development Corporation (CADC) in Frederick. He must arrange the schedules to provide for efficient use of the vans.

“It never fits perfectly,” he said. “You’ve got to tinker with it.”

The majority of trips in the seven county service area are to Lawton.

The Red River Transit Service fleet also provides transportation to Altus, Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Wichita Falls.

Safe, timely transportation is essential for persons who need dialysis or other medical treatment.

The drivers receive training in defensive driving, CPR and the proper technique for securing a wheelchair in the van.

In addition to transporting Medicaid clients, Red River Transit also provides demand response service within the city limits. Transportation is also provided to job sites through the Road to Work program.

“We take about 125 people to work every day,” Clayton said. Routes take workers to the Goodyear plant in Lawton and Halliburton in Duncan.

Children enrolled in the Head Start program ride to their classes on transit system vehicles.

There are over 80 vehicles in the transit fleet. Clayton estimates the agency makes about 18,000 passenger trips monthly.



Max Clayton, Transportation Supervisor for CADC, is charged with scheduling about 40 vehicles used to transport Medicaid clients to appointments.

Video Showcases Community Action Programs

“Community Action - A True Oklahoma Asset” is a newly released video that focuses on the unique roles agencies play as both social service and regional development organizations.

Written and directed by Jeff Schuman, Executive Director, Deep Fork Community Action Agency, the 10-minute video highlights housing, transit, tax preparation, early childhood and other programs provided by the state’s 20 agencies.

Community Action staff members distributed copies of the video to state lawmakers during the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies’ Legislative Conference in March. Each agency also received a copy to use in community outreach efforts.

The Oklahoma Department of Commerce underwrote the cost of the video.

The video stresses that Oklahoma’s Community Action Agencies not only assist those in need, but also inject huge amounts of money into local economies.



Jeff Schuman, Executive Director, Deep Fork Community Action Foundation, (right) shows Sen. Roger Ballenger a copy of the video about Community Action programs.

INCA Head Start Director’s Son Helps Children in Afghanistan

Clint Spence, son of INCA Community Services Head Start Director Mary Spence, helped collect school supplies for children while serving in Afghanistan.

Spence is an U.S. Army Reservist from Tishomingo.

Packs containing notebooks, pencils, pens, rulers and a toy of some kind went to about 1,000 children.

The soldiers had been visiting local schools and saw the need for supplies to help the children learn. Calls to home asking for schools supplies produced enough supplies to fill six vehicles.

Mary Spence reports her son is now in Mississippi where he has been training other soldiers.