



# Community Action Solutions

November - December 2003

## Winter Conference slated for Tulsa

OKACAA's Winter Conference is scheduled for Dec. 3-5 at the Doubletree at Warren Place in Tulsa.

Kathryn Taylor, Secretary of Commerce, is scheduled to speak during the general session.

Also on the program is Debbie Paz, Assistant Attorney General, who will speak on "Identity Theft - Protecting Your ID."

Training tracks are planned for Human Resources, Head Start, Social Services and Housing staff.

In addition, a full day of management training on "Developing Creative Problem Solving Skills" is scheduled.



Mary Brack, Outreach Director, Opportunities, Inc., (left) shows Executive Director Georgia Forthum some of the toys donated by a local department store to be distributed during the holidays.

## Community Action Agencies spread holiday cheer

More than 350 children in Blaine County will have a merrier Christmas this year thanks to **Opportunities, Inc.** and its partners.

This is one of several collaborative efforts undertaken by Oklahoma's Community Action Agencies to help brighten the holidays for low-income families in the state.

Working in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS), Opportunities, Inc. solicits donations to purchase Christmas gifts for youth and senior citizens.

Merchants, banks, companies and individuals all kick in to help make sure the kids have a present under the Christmas tree.

The program is an activity of

K.I.D.S. with C.A.R.E. which stands for "Kids Involved Don't Stumble with Citizens Arranging Resources and Exchanges."

Once wrapped, the gifts are distributed by Blaine County Commissioners.

**INCA Community Services** is involved in special activities in all four counties of its service area.

In Atoka County, gifts are collected through the Little Angel Tree Project for children between the ages of 0 - 12. The gifts are distributed by Santa at a Christmas party. In Marshall County, Santa Elves Christmas Gift and Food Baskets will be distributed.

INCA is partnering with other organizations in Johnston County to provide presents for children up to age

16. The agency is also partnering with a local youth group and a cleaners to collect, clean and distribute winter coats.

The agency is taking applications and organizing distribution of 165 Thanksgiving baskets in Murray County.

**Deep Fork Community Action Foundation**, based in Okmulgee, uses proceeds from different fund-raisers to purchase wrist watches for junior and senior high students in rural areas.

Deep Fork staffers wrap and then take the watches to school principals and administrators to distribute to kids they know in their school that will not be getting anything for Christmas.

*Continued on page 5*

## M.A.L.E. Initiative events planned by Delta

By 7 a.m. the meeting room in Joyce's Cafe in Maysville was nearly filled as children from the Early Childhood Learning Center gathered with fathers, grandfathers and other male role models for a "Breakfast of Heroes."

The breakfast was one of a series of special events planned by Delta Community Action's Head Start as part of its Fatherhood Initiative. The Maysville center is a collaborative effort of Delta and the public schools.

Dubbed the M.A.L.E. Initiative, which stands for "Males Add Love and Encouragement," the activities were developed at the center level to be responsive to the fathers that are striving to connect with their children, according to Angie Burk, Parent Involvement Manager.

As the crowd chowed down on the complimentary meal provided by Joyce Selman, Maysville Athletic Director Brad O'Steen urged the adults to be involved.

"Be supportive of your child," he said. "Dad's most important job is to be a role model in his child's life."

He also urged them to help children choose their friends wisely.

"Know who they are hanging out with and where they are," he said.

Other events included "Birdhouse Building" in Blanchard, "Donuts with Dad" in Duncan, Marlow, Pauls Valley, Purcell and Stratford. In Lindsay, the children and their dads played games together.

"This initiative is striving to encourage positive male role models to increase the level of attention and interaction with their children, not only in the home setting but in the educational arena as well," Burk said.

Selman, who has a grandson in Head Start, has been supportive of the program. Last year, Selman brought hamburgers and fries over to the children at the center, Monica Belicek, Center Director, said. "We're involved in the community," Selman said.

Burk said the staff has been very excited about these events and has taken the initiative to plan and get community support for them.

"We have had an excellent response when this initiative was discussed at the center level," Burk noted.

"It is remarkable what people will do in small rural communities for our children," she said.



Delta Parent Involvement Manager Angie Burk welcomed nearly 35 people attending the breakfast.



Maysville Athletic Director Brad O'Steen spoke about the importance of a positive male role model in the life of a child.



Alexis Stewart and Mike Whitefield enjoy breakfast at the Breakfast of Heroes in Maysville.



Monica Belicek, Maysville Early Childhood Learning Center Director, chats with Joyce Selman who hosted the breakfast.

## Southwest opens adult day care center in Altus

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group has opened an adult day care center in Altus.

Center Program Director Debby Tunning explained that the center is designed to provide special daytime care for adults who need assistance or are unable to care for themselves for extended periods of times.

“There are a lot of people out there that need it,” she said. The center is designed to serve up to 30 adults.

Initially, the center will be open from 6:30 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

According to Tunning, at least one-half of each day will have planned activities. These will include shopping trips, low-impact exercises and games.

“This individualized service will be

provided in a safe and caring environment, which promotes social,



*Debby Tunning, Program Director for the Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group Adult Day Care Center, checks on food supplies at the center.*

recreational and emotional support while preserving individual independence,” Tunning noted.

Adult day care centers also provide respite for caregivers and can reduce family stress by providing options for care.

Health education and monitoring, medication administration and assistance with therapies will be available, according to Tunning. In addition, a nutritionally balanced lunch and snacks will be provided each day.

Tunning explained that cost is determined by income on a sliding scale and that the Department of Human Services provides funding for adult day care for those who meet DHS guidelines.

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## Faith-based organizations aid Big Five Food Bank

First Christian Church of Marietta has always been one of the regular supporters of Big Five Community Services' Food Bank, checking regularly to see if there are any food needs.

Recently, when a representative of the church checked with Big Five on any additional food needs, she was told what was really needed was a freezer to store the food

they had received from other donors.

Taking the request back to the church, the congregation decided to purchase a freezer to help the food pantry meet its immediate needs, allowing donation of perishable items to be stored throughout the year.

“We are so appreciative of this generous donation,” said local director Jackie Watson. “Without this freezer, we were unable to keep these items for extended periods of time. This gives us so much more we can offer to local residents who truly have needs.”

Besides the First Christian Church, other local supporters play important roles in keeping the Big Five Food Bank supplied not only with food items, but other necessities as well.

The Falconhead Christian Fellowship and the First United Methodist Church are also helpful supporters of this nonprofit organization. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) grants also help make food available for the Food Bank.

The Big Five Food Bank operates on referrals from the Department of Human Services when they don't have time for emergency food stamps, from churches and anyone who declares a need.

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*Reprinted from the October issue of Big Five Community Services Network News.*



*Carolyn Shaw, President of the Oklahoma Head Start Association and Head Start Director for Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, spoke on parent involvement at an inservice training program at Little Dixie Community Action Agency in Hugo.*



# Southwest Oklahoma Community Action starts a Community of Promise in Jackson County

In 2001, Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group leaders learned about a positive youth development program called “Communities of Promise” while attending a conference in Utah.

Two years later, with help from AmeriCorps Promise Fellow Arlene Burgess, the agency helped mobilize more than 60 organizations, businesses and governmental agencies to create a Community of Promise in Jackson County.

“This program actually allows you to focus on the positive things that can be done,” explained Burgess.

Southwest’s Retired & Senior Volunteers Program (RSVP) hosts the program. Executive Director Neil Montgomery characterized the structure as “very unique.”

“It’s a program of RSVP. You’ve got seniors involved with youth,” he said.

It has helped break down some barriers between seniors and young people. Seniors lent a hand during a youth activities rally where 27 organizations showcased their programs and activities.

Jackson County’s Promise hosted or participated in a number of events during 2003.

- Over 40 students made January 20 a “Day On, Not a Day Off” by participating in the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service and Power of Five event. The Mayor of Altus and Chief of Police made opening remarks.
- In April, more than 140 youth conducted service projects such as cleaning up the reservoir, planting trees, caring for the yards of homebound seniors and conducting a free sports clinic for children as part of a community-wide observance of National Youth Service Day.
- More than 100 children received immunizations at the Immunization Clinic in June.
- During school enrollment in August, over 850 high school students learned about community service opportunities.
- Over 500 people stepped out for fitness by walking around the reservoir during the “Walk This Weigh” fitness campaign launched in October. Over 1,900 students walked in school

“It’s an example of how the healthy promise can be realized without us going and inventing something new, RSVP Director Teresa Williams said. “What we did was align ourselves with the Health Action Team and become involved with that program.”

Montgomery said he was overwhelmed by the number of groups actually involved with youth in Jackson County.

“There are just an amazing number of different things going on in difference places. There are groups out doing things that I never heard of,” he said.

Burgess said that feedback from some youth groups pointed to the benefits of working collaboratively.

Although Burgess has completed her year of service, Southwest plans to expand the program into Greer County. The agency has received funding for another Promise Fellow.



*AmeriCorps Promise Fellow Arlene Burgess (center) reviews her activities with Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group Executive Director Neil Montgomery and RSVP Director Teresa Williams.*

Plans are also in the works to create Internet sites and to begin introducing the Communities of Promise program to Harmon County residents.

## History of America’s Promise

Held in Philadelphia in 1997, the President’s Summit for America’s Future was a historic gathering of President Clinton, former Presidents Bush, Carter, Ford, Nancy Reagan and over 3,000 national, state and local government, business, nonprofit and civic leaders. At the summit, the Presidents and General Colin Powell challenged these leaders to commit more time, talent and resources to children and youth.

America’s Promise - The Alliance for Youth was established in the wake of the summit to carry forward the work begun in Philadelphia. America’s Promise identified Five Promises that all youth need to grow and develop to their full potential.

### The Five Promises

1. Ongoing relationships with caring adults - parents, mentors, tutors or coaches
2. Safe places with structured activities during non-school hours
3. A healthy start for healthy future
4. Marketable skills through effective education
5. Opportunities to give back through community service

# Housing projects approved for Muskogee County

Muskogee County Community Action Foundation (MCCAF) has been approved to get about \$1.3 million in Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME) funds to construct two low-income housing projects.

The first project, Muskogee Affordable Housing will consist of 59 rent to own houses built throughout the city as infill units, according to MCCAF Housing Director Bree

Long.

The two, three and four-bedroom houses are being built in partnership with G.M. Development, a local developer.

The project will receive about \$495,000 in HOME funds with construction cost expected to be around \$4.9 million.

MCCAF is the developer for the second project -- a 44-unit multifamily condo-style apartment complex.

Using \$795,000 in HOME funds and with a construction cost of about \$4 million, the project will include 22 two-bedroom and 22 three-bedroom units.

The complex will also feature a club house for family activities.

Both housing projects will be income-restricted.

Groundbreaking is planned for early spring.

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## Holiday cheer

*Continued from page 1*

**United Community Action Program**, the Pawnee County DHS and the Salvation Army collaborate to do an Angel Tree. Applications are taken and presents are distributed before Christmas.

Angels bearing the children's ages, sizes and wish lists are distributed throughout the county at city halls, churches, hospitals, banks and businesses. Everyone is invited to pick up an angel and fill a request.

The Coal County office of **Big Five Community Services** staff members conduct fund-raisers, sell homemade goods and accept donations throughout the year to purchase clothes and toys to distribute during the holidays.

Last year 47 families and 150 children received clothes and toys. In addition, two families receive food baskets with turkey and all the fixings for Christmas.

Each Thanksgiving, the staff asks local stores to provide donated goods to feed four needy families.

**Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties** refers clients to the Salvation Army and The Christmas Connection.

The agency completed 998 Christmas Assistance Applications for the Salvation Army and 588 for The Christmas Connection.

In addition, several faith-based groups provide Thanksgiving and

Christmas baskets to families referred by the agency.

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## KI BOIS supports Cancer Society

KI BOIS Community Action Foundation participated in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life in Haskell County.

The 23 members of the KI BOIS KOMRADES raised funds to help cancer research and help victims in need.

Sherri Dossey, Accounting Clerk, was chairperson for the KOMRADES and Royce Alverson, Accounting Specialist, served as coordinator for Haskell County.

"I am so pleased with what KI BOIS is doing for Relay for Life," Alverson noted in the agency's newsletter.

"Teams do different things to raise money for the Relay for Life. I'd like to thank all of the members on the KOMRADES team who have helped put things together," he added.

KI BOIS raised \$3,074 for the cause by having a raffle for a Longaberger Americana basket filled with lots of Americana goodies and a Bob Stoops autographed picture.

The KOMRADES also had silent auctions with noon meals each Wednesday in September, sponsored a softball tournament for area teams and participated in a gospel singing at a local church.

"We had great success with our fund-raisers," Dossey noted.

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### Housing conference set for April 4-6

"Solving the Housing Puzzle: 2004 Oklahoma Housing Conference" is scheduled for Apr. 4-6 at the Oklahoma City Marriott Hotel.

Liz Murray, subject of the Emmy-nominated Lifetime Original Movie "*Homeless to*

*Harvard: The Liz Murray Story*," headlines the conference.

Education programs include funding opportunities, construction options, rural housing, home ownership and rental development.

# Oklahoma Homebuyer Education Conference held in Oklahoma City



*The First Annual Oklahoma Homebuyer Education Conference attracted over 100 registrants from across the state.*



*Little Dixie Community Action Agency Housing Director Ron Walker discussed services available through the Homeownership Center during a Best Practices breakout session.*



*Rex Smitherman from the Fannie Mae Oklahoma Partnership Office outlined an African American Homeownership Initiative.*



*U.S. Representative Frank Lucas (3rd District) spoke during the opening session.*



*Oklahoma State Treasurer Robert Butkin spoke during the luncheon.*



*Homebuyer Education Coordinator Tricia Auberle reviewed regulatory issues.*



*Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group Head Start Director Sheila Clark (left) reviews lesson plans with Assistant Director Michael Balderas and teacher Colene Babcock.*

## Southwest collaborates with Altus school system on pre-K program

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group has entered into a unique collaboration with the Altus Public Schools to provide full-day pre-kindergarten classes in addition to its Head Start program.

Two classes located in Head Start Centers have 38 youngsters enrolled, explained Neil Montgomery, Executive Director. The youngsters in these classes may or may not be Head Start eligible. Southwest also operates four 4-year-old and five 3-year-old Head Start classes in Altus.

“That’s what’s different,” Montgomery said. “Children were accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.”

Both classes are filled and there is a waiting list, added Sheila Clark, Head Start Director. The public school system does not provide its own pre-kindergarten program.

A good working relationship with the public school system is essential, according to Montgomery. The Altus Public School system has contracted with Southwest for one year to provide the program.

“This is a trial year,” Montgomery said.

Southwest receives a specific amount from the school district for each child enrolled in the two classes.

“Hopefully it’s enough,” Montgomery said. “If it’s not, then after a year’s worth of data we will know. As an agency, we’ve committed to do it this year,” he added.

He hopes to expand the program next year. If the program is expanded, the public school system will probably have to provide the classroom space because Southwest has no more space available.

He noted that separating the expenses so that Head Start dollars were not spent on non-eligible children was a challenge.

“We’re really staying on top of it,” he said.

Montgomery credited Kay C. Floyd, Director of the Head Start State Collaboration Office, with helping structure the program. Floyd made several trips to Altus during the planning process to meet with Community Action and public school officials.

“We are meeting performance standards, licensing standards and state regulations,” Clark said.

The pre-kindergarten classes are very similar to Head Start classes. However, children in the two classes do not get the medical and dental screenings that Head Start children receive because funding was not provided.

The program provides free door-to-door transportation for children enrolled in the classes.

Between the two pre-kindergarten and four Head Start classes, Southwest is serving 112 four-year-olds. But Altus typically has about 350 youngsters in kindergarten so that means there are probably another 200 children who could benefit by attending the pre-kindergarten program.

Montgomery said the program is an outgrowth of the agency’s increasing focus on youth.

“That’s our future,” he said.

The classes have two staff members for every 19 children.

“All four-year-olds need a lot of attention,” Clark said.

Because of their experience in operating Head Start programs, Montgomery said Community Action Agencies should be involved with other early childhood programs.

“We are the experts with four-year-old programs,” he said.

Montgomery says one challenge that the agency will face when expanding the program will be to find qualified teachers. There are elementary school teachers but many lack the education in early childhood, he noted.

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*This was financed with funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For copies of articles in an alternate format, call 405-524-4124.*

## Member Agencies of the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies

### **Big Five Community Services**

Durant (580) 924-5331  
Serving: Bryan, Carter, Coal, Love  
and Pontotoc Counties

### **Central Oklahoma**

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Shawnee (405) 275-6060  
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Watonga (580) 623-7283  
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