

2002 Annual Report Executive Summary

East Arkansas Enterprise Community

"Uniting Efforts and Resources With Delta Citizens"

The East Arkansas Enterprise Community (EAEC) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization established in 1995 as part of a national rural development program through the US Department of Agriculture. The EAEC serves a four-county area in the Arkansas Delta that contains 11 small towns/cities and 6 census tracts. The EAEC membership is composed of municipal and county governments, state health units, school districts, housing authorities, private enterprise, individuals and community organizations. The EAEC programs are designed to help distressed areas improve themselves and serve the entire community, but focuses on the region's underserved populations; African-Americans, women and youth.

The EAEC stimulates vision and encourages leadership at all levels to resolve some of the most difficult economic and social challenges plaguing this area. This process of partnership for economic and social development and demonstration in these rural areas has been most rewarding. Business development will be targeted toward enterprises appropriate to small communities and the rural environment, including agriculture production and marketing, retail services, and small manufacturing. The EAEC seeks to enhance and expand operations, while providing new levels of administrative efficiency and new venues of community participation. Essential to the EAEC's vision is the delivery of creative programs and technical assistance, as well as the elimination of barriers that limit access to needed initiatives. This vision also includes increased access to public and private institutions, allowing a greater exchange of information, programs and services. Through the equitable and rapid advances in the comprehensive plan, the EAEC can cultivate the inherent intelligence of its citizens and the natural resources of the Arkansas Delta. The EAEC vision is one of new capacity to transform an underdeveloped region and people.

The majority population of east Arkansas, like other areas of the Mississippi Delta region, is African-Americans living in conditions of extreme poverty and rural isolation. The area is medically underserved and has low educational attainment. The region is characterized by high rates of unemployment, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and subsidized housing. The area has disproportionate levels of youth and elderly populations, as a lack of the adult employment opportunities often lead to outmigration. Despite challenging conditions, a strong community base and spirit of service is maintained through churches, schools, and community centers. The EAEC creates economic revitalization and human development in distressed neighborhoods and rural areas. It helps distressed areas improve themselves by stimulating vision and encouraging leadership at all levels to resolve difficult economic and social challenges.

The objective of the EAEC is to encourage residents, community groups, nonprofit organizations, businesses, local, State and Federal government agencies and other institutions to coordinate efforts and resource for creating economic revitalization and human development in distressed neighborhoods and rural areas. The EAEC encourages the coordination of resources by citizens and organizations. The EAEC benefits from various kinds of federal assistance, including information, training, federal tax incentives and technical support, to serve as a coordinating agency for and help implement locally developed holistic strategies for achieving long-term revitalization.

The EAEC is structured around and numerous successes can be found throughout the communities covering four (04) main areas of improvements:

- 1. Business and Industry/Economic Development

- 2. Infrastructure/Community Development
- 3. Health and Human Services/Human Development
- 4. Community and Governmental Capacity.

All areas are addressed through a set of twelve (12) benchmarks, each with distinct objectives, and activities developed by the community and partnership organizations. Great strides have been made toward achieving our strategic plan goals and we are on course to continue our endeavors. The EAEC is designed to empower people and communities in developing and implementing strategic plans to create job opportunities and substantial community development for themselves. Bringing new businesses, developments and initiatives to the area as well as retaining existing ones have been a major goal of the EAEC since its inception. Many communities have made great strides in this area. Program development has numerous crossover benefits, such as community centers (infrastructure development) being utilized for health outreach (human services). Governmental capacity programs have helped EAEC communities get resources from providers of micro enterprise to housing. The EAEC projects have provided for regional infrastructure and new micro enterprise development. Completed projects include fire stations, early warning systems, elderly and community centers, health care facilities, small businesses, small factory, improved water and sewer systems, improved airports, community parks and recycling plants.

An EAEC Community Loan Fund was established in 1999 and is operated in partnership with the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (ECD). As of December 2002, the Loan Fund has distributed \$588,500 to eight borrowers, of which \$147,125 is EAEC funding. The eight loans funded range from \$25,000 to \$137,000. Financing averaged $\frac{1}{4}$ of the aggregate credit amount. Annual Sales of the businesses are estimated at \$1.7 million and more than 20 jobs have been created from these eight small businesses. In addition, the ECD has loaned more than \$500,000 in the EAEC counties in 2002 outside of the EAEC census tracts. A highlight of the EAEC has been to continue to leverage other dollars. For the year ending 2002, an accumulative disbursement of \$2,766,893 has leveraged \$21,300,632 for a ratio of almost 7 to 1 - making a difference in the quality of life in the EAEC Census Tracts and Champion Communities.