

## **2003 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **East Arkansas Enterprise Community**

“...Collaboration, Partnerships and Trust = Empowered Communities...” The East Arkansas Enterprise Community, Inc. (EAEC) was designated April 27, 1995, as part of a national rural development program through the US Department of Agriculture as a community development initiative to empower people and communities through financial and technical assistance. The EAEC is a dedicated community / human / economic development team, partnered with Delta communities and organizations. The EAEC is an incorporated, non-profit, tax-exempt organization whose mission is to assist in providing innovative solutions/opportunities and forging lasting partnerships to meet the needs of citizens through a combination of individual initiatives and collective experience to empower the community with an unmatched ability to deliver results.

The Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) Initiative is a program designated to help distressed areas improve themselves. The Initiative stimulates vision and encourages leadership at all levels to resolve America’s most difficult economic and social challenges. It is a ten (10) year process, of collaborations, partnerships and trust for economic and social development and demonstration, in rural areas. The process started in October 1995, USDA and other Federal agencies provided information, training and technical assistance to rural communities. The objective of the EC Program is to encourage residents, community groups, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, Local, State and Federal government agencies and other institutions to coordinate efforts and resources for creating economic revitalization and human development in distressed urban neighborhoods and rural areas. Each area designated, as a Federal “Enterprise Community” (EC), benefits from Federal Assistance – including Federal Tax Incentives, allocated and earmarked funds, and technical support of various kinds, in order to implement locally-developed, holistic strategic plans for achieving long-term revitalization. The EC Program is designated to empower people and communities, across the Nation, in developing and implementing strategic plans to create job opportunities and substantial community development for themselves.

Population – within the four target area counties, the EAEC focuses on the six census tracts: Cross (9505), Lee (9702), Monroe (9501), St. Francis (9601, 9602, 9603). The EAEC is proud and extremely excited about the progress made and the continued progress being made in our 4-county, 11-small town/city, and 6-census tract areas. The EAEC has some responsibility for receiving and disbursing mini-grants to support Community, Human and Economic Development within the EAEC Census Tracts and Champion Communities. A highlight of the EAEC’s accomplishments has been to leverage other resources (private, state and federal) to support communities / projects. Since 1997, the EAEC has approved 67 projects, with a dollar ratio of almost 10 to 1 (\$2.8 million in EAEC funding, leveraging \$25 million from other resources), which are making a difference in the quality of life for the citizens in Eastern Arkansas.

Numerous successes can be found throughout the community covering four (04) main areas of improvements: Business and Industry/Economic Development; Infrastructure/Community Development; Health and Human Services/Human Development; Community and Governmental Capacity. Great strides have been made toward achieving our strategic plan goals. Bringing new businesses, developments, and initiatives to the area as well as retaining existing ones has been a major goal of the EAEC since its inception. Many communities have made great strides in this area. Completed projects range from enticing gas stations, new fire stations and early warning systems, elderly community centers, improved water/sewer systems, improved airports, truck stops and recycling plants, to the enhancing of existing and the creation of new youth programs and initiatives, community park and the establishment of an East Arkansas Enterprise Community Loan Fund – in collaboration with the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta.

The overall EAEC Benchmarks, goals, and objectives to be accomplished were established through community planning needs assessment in 1995. This far-reaching information served as the foundation for the EAEC program, approved by USDA in 1996. In 1997, a comprehensive plan was developed as a means of accomplishing these goals. The EAEC retained a professional engineering firm to develop specific comprehensive plans for each of the eleven (11) towns and communities and four (4) counties making up the population of the EAEC Census Tracts. These comprehensive plans targeted major infrastructure needs, which would have the greatest impact on Rural Community, Economic and Human Development in the area. Since 1997, the EAEC has served as the Intermediary for projects fulfilling the plans. In June 2003, the EAEC entered into an agreement with the Memphis US Army Corps of Engineers to update the comprehensive plans developed in 1997. Through this partnership, the US Army Corps of Engineers and its selected professional engineering firm will support additional Rural Community, Economic and Human Development for the next ten years. It is estimated that the net result will be approximately \$40 million to \$50 million dollars in program resources to the area. The objective is to implement components of the comprehensive plan targeting major infrastructure opportunities that will have the greatest impact on the area's Rural Community, Economic and Human Development. To date, 46 projects have been identified as a part of the comprehensive plan update. Projects will be selected based on cost and need with the initial amount being established at \$1 million. Additional projects will be added as funds are secured.

The EAEC model offers a process for community participation that is based on federal strategies for inclusion and community input. The base program development model implemented by the EAEC was originally proposed by USDA in its guidelines for the communities to respond to the rural development program. This process involves a 'bottom up' approach that begins all programming with input directly from the community. First, information on community needs is broadly collected across the target area. Then, community planning teams review the data and identify specific plans to address it. Finally, plans are coordinated through local organizations and on-going program review and administration is provided by the EAEC board and staff. This process, where community members have active roles in all levels of the development, is

extremely well suited to rural areas that lack population centers but include numerous isolated communities with similar characteristics. Specific components of the EAEC projects have strong replication potential in other Southern rural areas with large minority populations facing issues of economic need.

As a fulfillment of the USDA rural development model, the EAEC overall strategy also offers clear replicability for all non-urban areas. 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 factories, improved water and sewer systems, improved airports, community parks and recycling plants.