

## **2000 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Southwest Georgia United EZ (formerly Crisp Dooly EC)**

Synopsis: The year 2000 has been a year of growth and rebuilding for the Empowerment Zone. The EZ filled four vacant staff positions, and added one new position. The Board of Directors awarded the first EZ grants funds to local organizations based on recommendations by community committees. South Georgia Technical College became a true community college, the new Dooly-Crisp Unified Transportation System began operation, and the new Unadilla Primary Health Care Clinic opened. Construction continued on the Small Business Incubator and the St. Paul/Gillespie Selden 24-Hour Learning Center. On September 29, USDA Rural Development awarded the Empowerment Zone a \$256,500 Rural Community Development Initiative grant. Other Empowerment Zone towns and organizations received over \$1.9 million in grants and loans from USDA and other sources due to the Empowerment Zone designation. Planning began for new initiatives to meet goals and benchmarks in housing and agriculture.

General EZ Information: During 1999, the Southwest Georgia United Empowerment Zone (formerly the Crisp-Dooly Enterprise Community) was awarded its empowerment zone status. The first \$2,000,000 funding contract was completed in late 1999, and the first empowerment zone funds were drawn down in December of 1999. During 2000, a contract for a second \$2,000,000 in funds was completed.

The Empowerment Zone developed seven Goal areas in its original EZ grant application. Each Goal area contains several individual benchmarks. The Empowerment Zone reviews and updates Goal areas and benchmarks annually to insure that they continue to meet community needs. As a part of its annual update process in 2000, the EZ held stakeholders meetings in April 2000 on three topics: Childcare; Youth Development; and Culture, Tourism, and Business.

During the year 2000, the Empowerment Zone began the process of converting its systems and hiring staff to meet the challenges of its new status. Ms. Lisa Dixon continued as Administrative Assistant, but Ms. Bambi Hayes, Deputy Director, left in August to accept another position. The following new staff members were hired:

- Executive Director: Robert Cooke, March 2000
- Accountant: Ailysha Boatwright, August 2000
- Operations Manager: Patricia Easom, November 2000
- Business Incubator Manager: Wayne Foster, November 2000

The Board of Directors also approved the creation of the position of Community Program Specialist. This staff member will support, assist, and monitor the programs and administration of community organizations. Advertising for the position began in late December.

Due to funding uncertainties, the Empowerment Zone has chosen to hold competitive grant rounds annually, based on the availability of funds. The EZ held two initial competitive grant rounds during the year: The Young Victories summer program and an initial competition for EZ grant funds in all seven Goal areas.

The Young Victories summer youth grant program competition was held on a compressed timetable in

April and May. The competition provided a total of \$50,000 to six small, nonprofit organizations to fund summer activities for youth in Crisp and Dooly Counties. The Young Victories grants had a two-fold purpose. The grants both improved educational and social services to community youth and provided an opportunity for several small, young, nonprofit organizations to receive federal funding for the first time. This allowed these organizations to successfully learn about and develop the accounting and record keeping requirements and systems that are required of any organization that receives federal funding.

The initial competition for EZ grant funds in all seven Goal areas began in April and May of 2000, and the Board of Directors awarded funding on August 7. The Board awarded a total of \$1,444,640 to 20 community organizations in the six of the seven areas:

- Community Volunteers;
- Educational Training Programs for Life;
- Quality of Life - Tourism, Culture, Recreation, and Business Incubation;
- Quality of Life - Home, Work, and family;
- Government-Community Cooperation; and
- Medical and Social Opportunities.

The competition included a preliminary staff review of applications, a review and funding recommendation by Proposal Review Committees (composed of Board members and community volunteers), and a final funding approval by the Board of Directors.

No additional projects were submitted in the Goal area of Agriculture, but local farmers and Extension Agents began actively planning to use available funding in future rounds.

Including office operations, contingency funding, and long-term commitments to the Business Incubator and the Gillespie-Selden 24-hour daycare, the Board allocated a total of \$2,494,525 in EZ funding through the end of 2000.

During the year 2000, the Empowerment Zone reviewed and updated several policies and procedures to better serve the community:

- A draft of a modified and updated personnel policy manual was nearly ready for an attorney review by the end of 2000.
- After considering problems and rough spots encountered in the first large-scale grant application process, the Board approved a modified Proposal Submission and Review Policy, with attached procedures and forms, on October 23, 2000.
- The Board approved a full update of the EC and EZ benchmarks on September 25.
- The Board approved a modified contract for EZ subgrantees on September 25.
- Also on September 25, the Board reviewed a Strategic Community Plan for development of a Small

Business Administration One-Stop Capital Shop in the Business Incubator facility.

The Empowerment Zone also began using its weekly report to the USDA Rural Development office as a community tool by providing copies of the report to Board members, subgrantees, elected officials, and the press. Reports are distributed by e-mail to subscribers who have that capacity, and by U.S. postal mail to others. This report provides community members with continuing news of the EZ and its subgrantees and has also generated at least one newspaper story.

Empowerment Zone staff, staff from other community organizations, and community members cooperatively applied for several additional grants and other sources of funding during the year 2000, including:

- Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant,
- Georgia Child Care Council grant, and
- Hewlett-Packard Digital Village grants

The EZ received \$256,500 from the RCDI program, and also received support from the Department of Education to allow 225 students in the local school systems to use the Internet-based learning site SkillsTutor.com. This access and use has a value of approximately \$4,500. The EZ, University of Georgia, and both local school systems began working on the Department of Education GEARUP grant, with the goal of applying in 2001.

Other organizations within the Empowerment Zone also received additional funding during the year. The USDA Rural Development provided over \$515,000 in grants and approximately \$1.4 million in loans to various Empowerment Zone partners.

The Empowerment Zone visited and monitored the programs and activities of all organizations that had received Enterprise Community or Empowerment Zone funds beginning on November 29, 2000. Monitoring visits were held at organization offices and on program sites. Monitoring visits were completed in about two weeks, with the assistance of all staff members. The EZ intends that the primary responsibility for monitoring in the year 2001 will be a part of the duties of the new Community Program Specialist position.

The Empowerment Zone staff provided a draft of a 2001 Action Plan and Operations Budget for Board members' review at the Board meeting on December 6, 2000. The Action Plan will be considered for approval at the January Board meeting.

Representatives of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) visited the USDA Rural Development office in Athens, Georgia beginning on Tuesday, October 17, 2000 to review the implementation of the Empowerment Zone program in Georgia. Mr. Gary Smith from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began work in the Empowerment Zone office during the week ending Nov 17 and remained through the end of the year.

Empowerment Zone Accomplishments and Initiatives: South Georgia Technical College met one of the goals of the original Enterprise Community plan when it officially assumed its new name and status as a true local college at celebrations on November 1 and 2. The celebration in Cordele was held November 1, and a celebration at the main campus in Americus was held November 2.

The Unadilla Primary Health Care Clinic officially opened for business on Monday, December 4, 2000. The clinic is operated from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM by the Dooly County Medical Center with initial support from the Empowerment Zone. Dr. Joseph S. White is the primary care physician at the clinic. Dr. White is a Board-certified internal medicine physician. The clinic expects to initially serve patients during approximately 150 visits per month. According to Ken Rhudy, CEO of the Medical Center, "The mission of Dooly Medical Center is to provide quality, accessible health care to citizens of Dooly County. This is the last strategic piece in our plan to accomplish that mission."

The newly opened Dooly Crisp Unified Transit System (DCUTS) achieved greater success than it expected during November, its first month of operation. "Ridership has really taken off. We were expecting 600 rides and were able to actually do close to 1,000," said Stephen Dorough, Executive Director of DCUTS. DCUTS is a rural public transit provider that uses vans to provide transportation services in Dooly and Crisp Counties. The services during the first month of operation included trips to the polls for voting, as well as medical and shopping trips. About 70% of the services were provided to senior citizens.

"We will be bigger in January than we had thought, too," said Mr. Dorough. "Two larger contracts go into effect January 2. We expect to provide up to 165 rides per day, and we will have five vans on the roads." These services are possible because of the innovative use of multiple complementary funding sources, including the Empowerment Zone, the Georgia Department of Transportation, and the Georgia Department of Human Resources. DCUTS currently provides door-to-door service in Dooly County and hopes to provide door-to-door service in Crisp County starting in late spring of 2001.

Family Development Task Force held the grand opening of its Cordele youth center on Thursday, October 26, 2000. Bright Future Youth Center held the ribbon cutting ceremony for its new youth center facility on Thursday, November 9, 2000. In early 2001, Confident Kids, Inc. began using the community facility at the Morningside Public Housing apartment complex to providing services to young residents.

These organizations are all new, grass-roots corporations that provide educational services and social services to families and youth. They all received initial support from the Empowerment Zone during 2000.

The Executive Directors of all three organizations are black, female community leaders. Ms. Rosie Watkins, Ms. Ruby Jackson and Ms. Barbara Whitehead have all provided community services on a voluntary basis using small amounts of donated funds for several years, but have never before had significant funding that allowed them to address community needs.

Opening a new organization always means taking a risk. The process always involves pain, mistakes, and misunderstandings. The staff members and community volunteers in all of the new nonprofit organizations have proved themselves willing to take that risk, correct mistakes and misunderstandings, and work for continuous learning and continuous improvement in their organizations and the community.

Other partners and supporters of the programs of these three organizations include the Office of Adolescent Health and Youth Development, the Cordele County Commission, the Gillespie-Selden Rural Life Center, and the Cordele Housing Authority. All three organizations provide after-school activities for children and youth, and there are already waiting lists for their services.

Future Possibilities: The community served by the Empowerment Zone is considering several additional initiatives during 2001. These include a housing program and an agricultural revolving loan fund. The

Empowerment Zone organization has hired a staff member to implement to community's small business development program using the business incubator, after construction is complete. The Gillespie-Selden 24-hour childcare center is also expected to begin operations during 2001. Staff and volunteers will continue to seek additional funding sources to meet community needs.