

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise Community

It has been quite an exciting year in Southeast Oklahoma's Enterprise Community. New businesses have been established and existing ones have expanded. One such new business, a dry-cleaning establishment, funded in part by an Enterprise Community loan program, has taken off to a great start. This was a much-needed service in the area, especially with all the growth we are experiencing. The one dry-cleaning business in the area was having a hard time meeting the demand. It's always good when a new business doesn't hurt existing business. Our goal in the Enterprise Community is to keep up with the growing demands, not to replace existing businesses with new ones. Other businesses that were established or expanded included a Trucking Operation, Retail store, Welding Business, a Masonry Business and a Furniture Refinishing Business just to name a few. All these creations/expansions were made possible in part because of the Enterprise Community loans. Furthermore, these resulted in the creation of 17 new jobs and 6 jobs were saved.

These new businesses have definitely played a role in the boost to our economy which continues to improve. The Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise Community, which covers most of Choctaw County and a portion of McCurtain County, is very proud to report unemployment rates have dropped drastically since last year. This year, McCurtain County has a 5.6% unemployment rate compared to 8.6% last year. And, Choctaw County reports a 5.5% unemployment rate. This county's rate at this time last year was 10.4%. These unemployment rates are the lowest they have been in years. The rates are remaining low even during those months, that in the past, have always experienced high rates.

The Enterprise Community's efforts have really taken off. This year alone, more than \$7,830,891 (this accounts only for the dollars we've been able to track) was leveraged for projects within the Enterprise Community's Strategic Plan. For a breakdown of these dollars, see the following section (Most Significant Accomplishments). \$4,985,000 of this amount came from USDA-Rural Development EC Earmarked funds. USDA-Rural Development was often the source for much of the funding reported. Other sources include: Oklahoma Department of Commerce, HHS, HUD, Oklahoma State Dept. of Corrections, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, KEDDO, Little Dixie Community Action Agency, AmeriCorps, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Dept., Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka, Kansas, the Fannie Mae Foundation, Cities of Hugo, Idabel, Boswell, and Soper, Sarkeys Foundation, as well as several area businesses and residents.

Participation from the community was at an all time high. More and more individuals are getting involved in the EC initiative. This is probably largely due to more and more being accomplished and recognized in the communities. Although some disappointment followed the news of not being selected as an Empowerment Zone in Round II, it didn't hinder the efforts of the community to reach for their goals.

The Enterprise Community initiative works and the following report offers evidence to that. No one could say it better than our EC Steering Committee Chairperson who said: "The Enterprise Community designation is the best thing that has happened to this community in my lifetime and it works because it started at the bottom. No one else is telling us what to do, we are figuring it out for ourselves."