

2001 Annual Report Executive Summary

Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise Community

The Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise Community and the Southeast Oklahoma Champion Community covers the same geographical areas with the exception of developable sites. Our Champion Community, a Round II designation includes 2000 acres of developable sites. One, an 1800 acre area, is located in Pushmataha County while the other, a 200 acre area, is located in Bryan County. The remaining areas enjoy both Enterprise and Champion Community status and include two census tracts from McCurtain County and four census tracts from Choctaw County. Combined, our “dual” designation serves portions of four separate counties in the state. This report will focus on the activities of both.

Groundbreaking ceremonies, new business creation, existing business expansion, and new and improved technology centers were just a few of the events giving cause for celebration in 2001. From small libraries being created within nutrition centers to the construction of a \$17 million dollar physical rehabilitation hospital, The Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise and Champion communities have experienced improvement and growth like never before. As so well put by our steering committee Co-chairman—“The Enterprise Community designation is the best thing to happen to our community in my lifetime.” This statement rings true for so many throughout the Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise Community.

The Enterprise Community initiative has made American dreams reality. Because of our designation and the programs that were funded or given priority due to EC status, many residents are now living their dreams. In Economic Development, as an example, residents have been given the opportunity to start their own businesses—a dream made possible because of EC loan programs. Most, if not all of these business entrepreneurs, due to lack of collateral or for other reasons, would not have met eligibility requirements for conventional loans. These non-conventional loan programs such as SEEDS, Poor Man’s Bank, and CDBG provided alternatives. In 2001 alone, two new businesses were created while 2 others were expanded leading to the creation of 5 new jobs and the retention of 4 others. In Housing, a new Section 8 program, a Group WorkCamp project, Individual Development Accounts, and other such housing initiatives have resulted in the creation of suitable and/or affordable housing for many area residents. Through these programs, residents either received much-needed housing repairs or were afforded the opportunity to become homeowners, many for the first time in their lives. In Infrastructure, Antlers (Champion Community) had seven miles of Highway 3 (a main entrance into the city) completely reconstructed. Many businesses in the same community also received a “face-lift” making the downtown area much more attractive and inviting, not to mention safer, for both residents and visitors alike. Cities of Boswell and Soper obtained funding for improved water and wastewater systems, bringing city water available to many whom had forever been dependent upon private wells. The 4-laning of Highway 70, which began a few years ago, continued with much work being completed in the Eastern portion of the Enterprise Community. This \$72 million dollar project is expected to be completed within the next year or two. In Social and Human Development, Fort Towson, Grant, and Boswell Nutrition centers either expanded or converted existing space to include libraries in the centers. Much of the literature/books comes from donations, either by area residents or local organizations. Now residents don’t have to drive the 5 to 20 miles for library services. In Education, Hugo Schools received 1 of 5 grants awarded nationwide for a Safe Schools initiative. This \$2.6 million dollar grant will create four full-time jobs. In Idabel, a state-of-the-art technology center is nearly complete. It will be housed in the BTW Community Center, a center made possible through funding from the original SSBG/EC dollars. In Public Safety, a 911 system was put into place. This project was funded with SSBG/EC funds. County roads were identified and signage was installed making it possible for emergency services, i.e. police, fire and ambulance to have a much quicker response time.

Above are just a few of the projects from our Strategic Plan(s) which were implemented in 2001. Enterprise Community alone did not make all this happen, but it did, in every case, play some role either in the form of direct funding or priority. And the Enterprise Community Initiative was the motivation for writing our strategic plan in the first place. One thing that cannot be emphasized enough is the importance of partnerships in this process. Without partners, all we would have is a plan and implementation would be no more than a dream.

The combined resources of various organizations are what make things happen. In 2001, new partnerships were created and existing ones strengthened. Partnering with the Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise and Champion Communities in 2001 in an effort to achieve the goals within our plan include: The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Inc., United States Department of Agriculture/Rural Development, Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, local City and County governments, local financial institutions, U.S. Department of Education, McCurtain County Educational Co-Op, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration, Rural Enterprises Incorporated, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, E.T. Dunlap Institution for Higher Learning, Antlers Business Improvements Organization, Pushmataha Development Initiative, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, U.S. Department of Transportation, AmeriCorps, Idabel Minority Action Committee, area schools, area businesses, civic organizations and local residents just to name a few. All of the organizations listed plus many others all played in a key role in one or more of the projects completed in 2001, with many partnering in several projects.

In summing up, the Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise and Champion Community would like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation for all the technical support provided at both the state and national level. Mrs. Sally Vielma, our state EC specialist, Mrs. Sharon Colbert, our desk officer at OCD, and Mr. Rick Wetherill, director of OCD's Empowerment division, have always made themselves available to answer any questions we have and we have a lot. They keep us updated both firsthand and through the EZ website (thanks to Karen Murray and others) of upcoming events and conferences which they feel might be of benefit to our communities. They also keep us informed of programs, available funding, and other resources that might be helpful in our efforts aimed at implementation of our strategic plan. We greatly appreciate their guidance and support of our Enterprise and Champion Communities.