

## **1999 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Lower Yakima County Enterprise Community**

1999 represents a turning point in the local REC initiative. While we continue to move forward and build on the success of several initial benchmarks, we are now focusing more directly on long-term community development capacity building. This effort is best summarized in the statement that we want to shift our effort from procuring services with the REC grant to using the grant as a leverage point to directly provide services.

Industrial development is a primary goal of our program. This year the Port of Sunnyside acquired a major development site adjacent to utilities originally financed by the REC. Both Port Districts in the REC were successful in obtaining funding to improve roads to their properties. The REC is now partnering with our county economic development agency to evaluate the best way to develop and market these industrial sites.

The City of Grandview continues to move forward with the long-range project to upgrade the City's industrial wastewater treatment facilities. The initial phase of this upgrade was partially financed by the REC, and the investment has allowed a major food products company to build a new processing facility that will provide 275 seasonal jobs.

One of the REC's successful early efforts provided vocational training for over 200 local area residents. With REC help the community college has renewed the program and is working to identify new and expanded options for job skills development. The REC also continues to build on its relationship with the local schools and sponsored two major funding efforts in the areas of "School-to-Work" and "Youth Opportunity".

The program's housing initiatives have been a major focus in 1999, with initial efforts to implement the Housing Action Plan completed in 1998. Public education is one goal of the effort, with the REC joining the Washington Low Income Housing Network and working to create a housing coalition in the REC area. The REC also became more active in local housing ordinance discussions.

Organizational capacity building has been a primary focus in terms of both legal organization and community representation. In 1997 the REC program identified a strategy to implement a new governance structure by replacing the county advisory committee with a local non-profit Board. During 1999 several key steps were completed to finish this transition.

A new and expanded citizen Board which was initiated in late 1998 was finalized. This effort included development of a Board Manual and conducting of local and USDA training activities. Several Board members attended the national workshop in Memphis. The new agency also obtained 501c3 designation from the IRS, providing the avenue to now seek private funding sources. The culmination of this effort was the signing in late December of a contract with Yakima County to assume responsibility for day to day operation of the program. This in turn led to the agency forming a dedicated permanent program staff. At year-end the agency was busy with the remaining administrative tasks needed to implement this new structure.

Partnerships continued to form in 1999, and the community was successful in accessing over \$5.8 million in leveraged funds. Important partners include the National Center of Excellence at Heritage College, state and regional USDA staff, the local Ports and business development agencies, local public and private schools and Yakima Valley Community College, the Workforce Investment Council, and several state and local housing advocacy agencies.