

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Southwest Georgia United Empowerment Zone

On January 13, 1999, the Crisp/Dooly Partnership's application for Empowerment Zone (EZ) status was approved and announced by Vice President Al Gore at a ceremony in Washington, D.C, thus becoming the Southwest Georgia United Empowerment Zone, Inc. Several representatives from the EZ were in attendance including U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop and USDA Rural Development State Director, Laura Meadows. The EZ has gone through significant changes during 1999 including three staff changes and completing and /or obligating all EC initiatives and/or funding.

The St. Paul/Gillespie Selden Learning Center broke ground on its new center. In addition to receiving commitments from EZ and EC funds, they received funding from the GA Department of Community Affairs, St. Paul Presbyterian Church, Gillespie Selden Institute, and USDA Rural Development. This center will house a 24-hour-a-day childcare center for 125 children and will assist parents who are trying to get off welfare and go to work. The construction on the Small Business Incubator is finally underway. The Byromville Primary Care Center continues to exceed all expectations to provide health care to previously under-served residents of Dooly County, including our growing Hispanic population.

The following partnerships were also formed:

1. University of Georgia;
2. Fort Valley State University;
3. Crisp County Community Council;
4. Office of Adolescent, Health, & Youth Development;
5. GA Legal Services;
6. Consumer Credit Counseling Services;
7. Crisp and Dooly NAACP's;
8. Byromville Community Development Association;
9. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development;
10. Small Business Administration; and
11. Several grassroots organizations.

The EZ has also done more outreach to the community by staying abreast of local activities and participating in events such as the Watermelon & Big Pig Jig Parades and speaking engagement on WSST-TV (our local television station) as well as the continued coverage we have received from our local newspapers. Representatives from the community, Board members, and staff attended the 1999 White House Community Empowerment Conference in Edenburg, TX.

The EZ's commitment to the community and its youth was apparent in its application to the US Department of Labor for a Youth Opportunity Grant. Goals for the grant are to greatly reduce the high school dropout rate, to increase entry into and success in post-secondary education, to develop youth as citizens and leaders, and to assist youth in preparing for and succeeding in employment.

During our Memorandum of Agreement signing, over 175 residents from all sectors of the community gathered to celebrate the EC's past accomplishments and future successes using the EZ as a vehicle.