



# Advocates for Community and Rural Education

## Eudorans prioritize projects in meeting

The Eudora ACRE group held its second Community Forum for visioning and planning at the Eudora gymnasium on Monday, March 23.

The Gloryland Pastor's Choir with Pastor Cedric Hayes kicked off the event with inspirational singing by the 80 person strong youth choir. The choir is made up of children from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade.

At the forum four Focus Groups that had been meeting bi-weekly for more than two months made presentations and recommended projects for Eudora's Rural Community Revitalization Project.

### City Beautification

The City Beautification focus group made the following recommendations:

1. Clean up vacant lots
2. Tear down old houses
3. Create Community Garden
4. Work on city library
5. Establish Community Watch program.

### Education

The Education group has long had strong advocates who first worked to keep from losing the school and more recently have been working to establish a charter school.



More than 60 people turned out in Eudora for presentation of Focus Group recommendations. Residents voted to prioritize projects in the areas of Education, City Beautification, Environment & Natural Resources, and Economic Development and City Services.

Their recommendations were:

1. Charter school grades 4-8
2. Vocational training school
3. Driver's education training
4. Workplace readiness center

### Environment & Natural Resources

The Environment and Natural Resources focus group recommended projects for both reclaiming and preserving natural resources. They recommended:

1. A city-wide clean-up
2. Recycling program
3. Filtering system for pond at city park
4. Birdwatching area at city park
5. Flowers and benches at Grand Lake

### Economic Development and City Services

The Economic Development and City Services group made eight recommendations:

1. Festival/Rodeo/Carnival/Circus to make better use of fairgrounds and park
2. Community Center
3. Trade school with internship program
4. Annual Eudora Reunion
5. Hotel/B & B
6. Farmer's Market/Flea Market
7. Public transportation
8. Signs to promote Eudora

The next step is for the community to complete its strategic plan, although Project Leader Erma Toney says some groups have started on projects and a grant writing seminar is planned for April 25 and May 2.

## Small schools get no joy from legislators during 2009 session

Despite valiant efforts by their legislators, supporters came away empty handed after three attempts to mitigate the effects of consolidation laws on small schools in the legislative session just ended..

Three small districts—Delight, Turrell, and Weiner—spent most of the year under the minimum 350 enrollment, although Turrell and Weiner actually climbed above that mark before year's end.

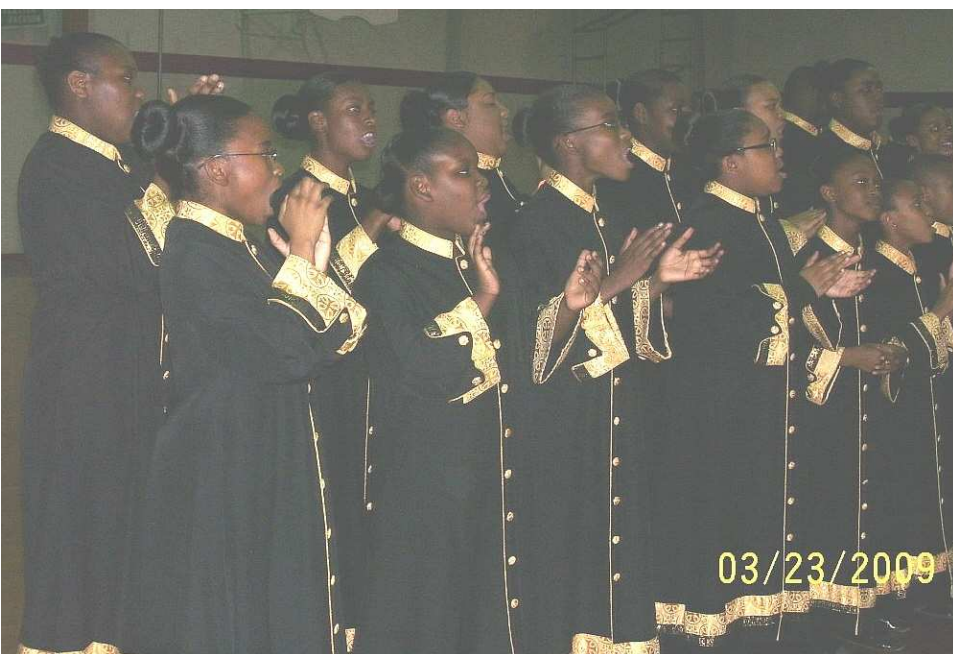
Another district, Cushman, was consolidated and will close its campus and move its students to Batesville in the 2009-2010 school year.

A bill by Senator Larry Teague would have extended the number of years that a school could fall below 350 from two years to four.

Senator Teague's bill was introduced into the Senate Education Committee with the argument that difficult economic times hit small rural places especially hard and that districts need more time to develop strategies to reverse population declines.

Turrell and Weiner both presented information on new initiatives within their district boundaries that would add students given a little time. Senator Teague presented a letter from an attorney stating that the bill did not substantially change the Lake View school funding lawsuit settlement, and that the Supreme Court in the Lake View decision specifically disclaimed any intention to interfere in the State Legislature's role of formulating legislation.

Representatives of the Attorney General and the Department of Education, however, argued that any change (see LEGISLATORS on p. 2)



The Gloryland Pastor's Choir under the direction of Pastor Cedric Hayes entertained and inspired Eudora residents at their visioning-planning meeting for community revitalization on March 23.

**LEGISLATORS, cont.**

passed in 2004 as Act 60 would endanger the whole framework of the Lake View settlement. Supporters were told by the Governor's office that he also strongly opposed any changes to Act 60.

In spite of heavy lobbying by small school supporters, the bill failed to make it out of the Senate Education Committee, with Senators Gene Jeffress, Steve Bryles, Johnny Key, and Kim Hendren voting for it and Senators Jimmy Jeffress, Shane Broadway, Joyce Elliott, and Mary Ann Salmon voting against it.

**Preschool students and enrollment**

Another effort by Representative Randy Stewart of Kirbyville would have allowed districts to count students in state-funded preschools, a category of student that did not exist before Act 60, in the district enrollment.

The same opponents again argued Representative Stewart's bill was simply an attempt to avoid consolidation and stated that they were opposed to any measure that had this effect. The bill failed on a voice vote in the House Education Committee.

**Counting all of the two years**

Rural school supporters made one more attempt to mitigate Act 60's effect on small districts with Representative Buddy Lovell's HB2263.

This bill changed only one word in the current law. Its effect would have been to require that a school fall below the 350 minimum enrollment in all eight quarters of the two years preceding consolidation instead of using a two-year average.

The Attorney General's representative again argued that this was too much of a change from present law and would endanger the Lake View settlement.

The bill passed the House Education Committee by a vote of 12-8. It passed the House of Representatives with an impressive 89-8 margin.

However, the Senate Education Committee again blocked further movement after testimony by the Attorney General's staff, ADE director Ken James, and the attorney for the ADE. This time a representative of the State Chamber of Commerce was recruited to claim that all of the academic gains and funding gains of the past six years would be endangered if this bill passed.

After several days of maneuvering, the bill got a hearing before the complete Senate Education Committee and failed to pass out of committee with four members voting for, three voting against, and one failing to appear.

Again, Senators Gene Jeffress, Bryles, Key and Hendren supported the bill and Senators Jimmy Jeffress, Broadway, and Elliott voted against it. Sen. Mary Anne Salmon was not present at the committee meeting.

Great credit goes to the bill's

sponsors, Representatives Buddy Lovell, Charolette Wagner, and John Burris and Senator Larry Teague for maneuvering through the legislative process to give it every chance to pass.

**What now for small districts?**

For now it seems there will be no legislative relief from the strict application of Act 60 favored by the current administration, although this doesn't mean people who believe in small, local schools should or will stop trying.

Several legislators have mentioned having an interim study to examine the effects of consolidation on communities. This idea should be expanded to include funding, student success, length of bus rides, and even the way the funding formula disadvantages small districts by twice penalizing them for their size.

There is a local angle, too. The 32 districts with between 350 and 500 students need to take immediate steps to stabilize and grow their enrollments. ACRE has 12 steps a community can take to do this, some simple and some more complicated. The organization stands ready to help any community establish and carry out a plan to reduce out-migration and increase their prosperity to ensure their school's survival.

State policy still needs to change. Economic development policy needs to include strategies for alleviating poverty and increasing prosperity in small rural communities. Education policy needs to recognize the value of local control and keeping kids close to home and put small schools on a level playing field with everyone else.

Meanwhile what will happen to Delight, where every student can be in extracurricular activities and the Multicultural Club celebrates the diversity in their school created by both racial diversity and their traditional relationship with international students?

What will happen to the kids at Turrell who depend on school administrators to get them to medical and dental appointments when they have no other transportation?

What will happen to local businesses in Weiner when the state closes their Golden Apple school district for no other reason but that they don't meet an arbitrary enrollment number?

**Fact: There is no such thing as "administrative consolidation." 80% of districts consolidated by Act 60 have closed campuses.**

**Learning and teaching others—ACRE staff participates in regional and national conferences**

On March 26-28 Lead Organizer Dorothy Singleton and Policy and Education Director Lavina Grandon traveled to Jackson, MS, to attend a training conference at the offices of Southern Echo, Inc., the South's premier community organizing nonprofit, which specializes in education and social justice issues.

The purpose of the training was to teach member organizations how to build sustainable infrastructure for effective grassroots community organizations. Topics included fund-raising, membership recruitment and retention, financial management, and policy development.



**Southern Echo Assistant Director Brenda Hyde and Executive Director Leroy Johnson give pointers on good financial management of nonprofits.**

On April 4, Lavina Grandon and Executive Director Renee Carr, along with the president of the Rural School and Community Trust, Rachel Tompkins, presented a session on establishing stronger connections between rural schools and communities at the National School Boards Association national conference in San Diego.



**Lavina and Renee traveled all the way to San Diego to meet these board members from Stephens School District and enjoyed getting to know Maurice, Hurlen, and Erma.**

Meanwhile, Dorothy made a trip to Tuskegee, AL, to participate in a reunion of Rosenwald School graduates and learn about efforts to preserve these historic relics of African-American education in the 1930's, 40's, and 50's.

April 19-21 saw the entire ACRE staff in Hendersonville, NC, for the Rural School and Community Trust's annual Rural Education Working Group, where grass-roots activists share experiences and expertise in working to improve rural schools and communities with their counterparts across the nation.

# Join us for the ACRE Summer Conference!

Learn how to be an advocate for your rural school and community. Help develop a campaign to make every child matter. Help formulate rural policy issues and plan legislative strategy. Participate in ACRE's strategic planning process. Network with other rural school and community supporters. Learn how small communities are improving economic opportunities and quality of life. Get ideas for your own.

## REGISTRATION FORM

**Small Works!** *Making the most of assets in small schools and communities.*

July 24-25, 2009, at  
Conway Hilton Garden Inn  
[www.aracre.org](http://www.aracre.org)

Please check below:

\_\_\_ **ACRE members:** Conference and sharing a room with another participant - **\$15**

\_\_\_ **ACRE members:** Conference and one room for **couple** or **family** - **\$25**

\_\_\_ **ACRE members:** Conference and private room - **\$70**

**Not a member?** You can join by sending \$10 dues to the address below along with your registration form and fee.

Conference includes lodging on Friday night as well as breakfast and lunch buffets on Saturday.

(all names in your party, including children)

(preferred roommate)

(address: street, city, state, zip)

(home/business phone & cell)

(e-mail address)

(payment amount enclosed)

Mail payment with registration form to:

ACRE  
c/o Renee Carr  
633 Highway 9  
Fox, AR 72051

For more information call 870-363-4411 or e-mail [cpa@mvtel.net](mailto:cpa@mvtel.net)

Advocates for Community and Rural Education is a family-friendly organization.  
Please feel free to bring your family with you, including young children.

### Save our schools

Lavina Grandon, Executive Director  
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Email: [lavinagrandon@aracre.org](mailto:lavinagrandon@aracre.org)

Helping rural schools and  
communities survive and thrive

Check out our website at  
[www.aracre.org](http://www.aracre.org)

## SmartEdge gives students and elders alike the edge in financial literacy

Since December ACRE trainers have conducted 22 sessions of financial literacy training to more than 650 participants using GMAC's SmartEdge financial literacy course.

Designed by GMAC Financial Services, the program does not promote the finance company but offers as a public service education in budget and credit issues, banking, auto finance, insurance, and home mortgages. Most sessions are hour-long modules presented in a Power Point format with an accompanying workbook.

The sessions are taught to high school seniors and adults in churches, community groups, and other venues, with special emphasis on helping young people make sound financial decisions about credit cards and loans. Lead Organizer and Trainer Dorothy Singleton says she has gotten very positive feedback from groups taking the classes.

One high school principal contacted her after the class to say that students had been talking about it and wanted to learn more.

Singleton reveals she is shocked by some of the information she and other trainers learn while presenting the class. It's surprising how many senior citizens are still dealing with credit issues, especially around medical and hospital bills, she says.

Even more shocking is how many young kids are dealing with identity theft.

The most often taught module, Budget and Credit, deals with how to create and stick to a budget; what a credit score is; how to access your credit report; how to protect your credit; and how to protect yourself from identity theft.

ACRE offers the classes to any group of 30 or more people age 17 or above at no cost to the participants.

If you have questions or are interested in scheduling a class, you can contact the following:

**Dorothy Singleton, 870-718-3836, [mizdb50@aol.com](mailto:mizdb50@aol.com)**  
**Renee Carr, 870-870-363-4411, [cpa@mvtel.net](mailto:cpa@mvtel.net)**

## Oldest ACRE member?

Is this our oldest ACRE member? Ruby Berry celebrated her 90th birthday with a gathering of 100-plus family members at the Rural Special Cafeteria in March.

Known by everyone as "Granny," you can always count on seeing her at church every Sunday, home ballgames, school programs, and community events. Many of her descendants are active in the Rally For Rural Special ACRE chapter at Fox.

ACRE follows the intergenerational model of organizing, in which family members from infants to grandparents are encouraged to join in all activities.



## Leslie, Delight, and Eudora kick off revitalization projects

"Your taste buds belong here," proclaims the flyer advertising Leslie's new Ozark Mountain Market, a farmer's market that opened on April 25 on the square in Leslie and will run every 2nd and 4th Saturday through the month of October.

The opening market day will feature plants and seedlings, along with fresh produce, handmade crafts, live music, and family fun.

The Ozark Heritage and Arts Center also has a full slate of activities, including the Small Works on Paper exhibit from the Arkansas Arts Council in April, a town meeting with Senator Mark Pryor's staff and luncheon with Searcy County Chamber of Commerce on May 12, a Gospel Music Festival May 29-30, and the 12th annual Fiddler's Contest June 20. The center and museum are open daily and have other regular activities.

Meanwhile, City Beautification Focus Groups at Delight and Eudora and doing town clean-up, demolishing old buildings and fixing up existing ones. Delight is in the planning stages of creating two museums. Eudora has scheduled grant-writing classes for two Saturdays and is working on a charter school application. Both communities are working on their strategic plans.