



# Advocates for Community and Rural Education

## ACRE members “Catch the Vision” at 2008 summer conference



ACRE members work together to analyze education and community development issues and to formulate policy proposals for the 2009 legislative session.

The 2008 ACRE summer conference held on July 25-26 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Conway was a big success, with 126 participants from 23 different communities.

The theme of the conference was Catch the Vision, and community members from around the state came together to identify with ACRE’s mission for rural Arkansas of *excellent schools, vital communities, and committed citizens*.

In the Friday night visioning session, participants joined together in small groups to vision their ideal school or community. They found that all envisioned busy communities with churches, schools, adequate shopping, banks, transportation services, health care, police and fire protection, affordable housing, government services, library, museum/arts centers, senior services, community centers, and youth centers.

Their ideal also included progressive and involved city governments, active merchants’ associations, spiritual leadership, jobs, educational opportunities, community unity, activities for everyone, utilization of natural resources, day care, volunteer pro-

grams, and communities that are sustainable and environmentally responsible.

Their ideal school included striving for excellence, qualified teachers, parent involvement, diverse curriculum, committed students, good leadership, technology, cultural diversity, extracurricular activities, environmental awareness, after-school programs, and most of all local campuses.

Saturday morning started with a review of ACRE’s strategic plan. Members commented that on education we need to have local schools with limited bus rides, schools where every child is valued and where every child’s needs are met, and relevant curriculum where children learn what they need to know in today’s world.

On communities, participants indicated that we should work together to solve our problems, “grow our own” solutions, speak up and speak out about issues, and get state agencies to work with us and to work together to help us revitalize our communities.

ACRE members practiced collaborating on solving some of the tough issues facing their communities when they modeled using “Fence Talks” discussion guides for “neighbor-to-neighbor” discussions of such topics as the following:

### Education—

- At-risk Students
- Positive School Climate
- Quality Education
- Parental Engagement
- Policy Issues for Rural Schools

### Community Revitalization—

- Total Community Makeover
- Total Community Involvement
- Microenterprises in Small Communities
- Financing Our Future
- Thinking Green
- Involving Youth in Our Communities
- Assets in Rural Communities
- Policy Issues for Rural Communities

A motivational speech by Melanie Yelder, director of the Arkansas Teacher Housing Development Foundation, and the keynote address by Senator Jack Crumbly set the tone for participants’ collaboration on identifying and prioritizing 10 policy issues for the 2009 legislative session. Issues members wished to support included

1. Returning closed school buildings to the communities that paid for them.
2. More money for rural schools.
3. Money for economic development and training programs in small communities.
4. State grants and low-interest loans for Rural Enterprise Zones.
5. Grants for youth enterprises.
6. Changes in State Board of Education.
7. Broadband Internet in rural areas.
8. Recall of elected officials.
9. Commission to study update of vocational training.
10. Rural transportation services.



Dorothy Singleton and a series of “neighbors” inspired participants to Catch the Vision for school and community.

# Delight begins ACRE's first Rural Community Revitalization project



The number one topic on the minds of Delight residents these days is saving the town and saving their school.

Population 311 in the 2000 census, as with many of Arkansas' small towns statistics show a 4% decline in both population and jobs since then.

In fact, in spite of ups and downs, the population in surrounding Pike County has never in succeeding censuses reached its boom period high of 12,565 in 1910. Since 2000 the county has seen an alarming 11% job loss.

Delight residents hope to reverse that trend, however, with a new Community Revitalization Project that they have undertaken with Advocates for Community and Rural Education.

## Rural Community Revitalization

ACRE's Rural Community Revitalization Project, according to Policy and Education Director Lavina Grandon, is a way of bringing together residents of every demographic group to assess community strengths and weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and counter threats.

In the beginning phase, residents survey their community, then hold an Assessment Forum with representatives from state resource agencies and organizations that can help them plot a better future for their town in the areas of education, economic development, environment/natural resources, community and family services, and heritage preservation.

ACRE's resource partners in this effort are the Arkansas Rural Education Association, Arkansas African American Administrators Association, Audubon Arkansas, Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Regional Planning and Development Districts, Arkansas Department of Rural Services, USDA Rural Services, and Department of Arkansas Heritage.

This initial Community Forum is followed by Focus Group meetings in

the areas outlined above. Focus Groups will meet for about two months and then make recommendations at a second Community Forum for strategic planning. The community will then begin to implement projects in all of the focus areas.

Grandon says she hopes each place which conducts revitalization projects (Delight, Leslie, and Eudora in 2008-09) will place a special emphasis on youth development, as young people are the future of any community.

## Delight History

Delight's history as a town began with the coming of the railroad. Located in the Wolf Creek Valley, the town site was effectively "donated" when early settler William H. Kirkham sold a right-of-way to the Southwestern and Indian Territory Railroad for \$1 in 1895.

According to *Our Town* by Bess Galloway, Kirkham was then given the privilege of naming the town, and he said, "I hope this will be a delightful place in which to live. We will name the town Delight." Again according to Galloway, it is the only town or city in the United States to bear this name. Delight became an incorporated town in 1905.



Delight's early growth and prosperity was based on the timber industry, which is still important in the area today. Over the years, several sawmills came and went, with the town enjoying two boom periods from 1900-1920, when the best of the timber was harvested, and again from 1937-1952, when a second large sawmill was destroyed by fire.

Due to the railroad, Delight was also a good market for farm products,

including fresh fruit and vegetables and cotton.

At its height, the town boasted a mercantile business, general store, hardware and dry goods store, variety store, barber shop, and several grocery stores. There were several doctors and a drug store, a bank (still in existence as the Bank of Delight), a phone company, and a post office. There was a livery stable, and with the passage of time, gas stations and car dealerships. The town had several churches of various denominations

## Delight School

In 1903 a new school building was constructed to serve the town's 500 residents. As time went on, this building was added to in order to accommodate the town's growing size. Destroyed by fire in 1923, a new building was constructed and the Delight School District was enlarged to take in the surrounding communities of Antoine, Pike City, Pisgah, Bowen, Pine, and Billstown.

In 1939 and 1940 a new high school and grade school were built, and later the district added a vocational building, a home economics cottage, and a gymnasium.



According to the school's website, [delightschools.org](http://delightschools.org), the school provides

- Highly qualified teachers
- Multiple opportunities for participation in a variety of activities
- Individualized, personalized instruction with regular communication between teachers and parents or guardians
- A family-like atmosphere
- Guided, inclusive, continuous academic and career counseling
- Research-based, effective instruction programs
- Small class sizes.

## ACT 60 Threat

One of Delight's greatest concerns is the threat posed by Arkansas Act 60 to their school. According to this 2004 law, any school district which falls below 350 enrollment will be forced to consolidate with another district.

Delight is now slightly below that number, and although the town is taking numerous creative steps to increase the school enrollment, residents fear they may not be able to do enough to avoid eventual consolidation. Finding a way to keep their

school local is the primary goal of the Education Focus Group (shown below) in the revitalization effort.



### Delight's Present and Future

In 1960 the town of Delight won 4th place in an Arkansas "City of Tomorrow" contest. The town had 33 thriving businesses, and the sign on Highway 26 leading into Delight read: *Welcome to Delight, A City of Friendly People, Modern Utilities, Good Churches and Schools—Faith in the Future.*



Although not as prosperous today, the city still has good infrastructure, a good school, and several businesses that most rural small towns have lost: Two cafes, a hometown bank, hardware store, supermarket, auto parts store, filling station and convenience store, oil distributorship, flower shop, and town library.

Alexander Printing Company does a nation-wide business in religious publications and other printing needs.

### Economic Development



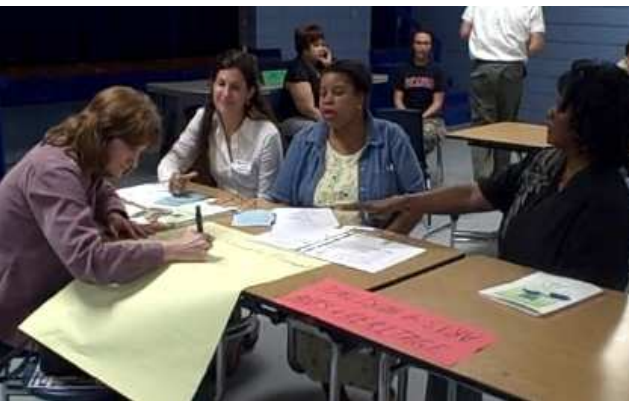
At the October 9 Community Forum for Assessment, members of Delight's Economic Development Focus Group met with Butch Calhoun of the Arkansas Department of Rural Services, Karen Barlow of West Central Arkansas Economic Development District, Kevin Sexton of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, and Susan Cox of USDA Rural Development to find out about available services and financial resources to revitalize the economic future of the community.

The Community Revitalization process emphasizes quality of place and

quality of life as well as improving educational and economic opportunities.

### Arts and Heritage

There are two possibilities for heritage sites in Delight and the surrounding communities. In nearby Antoine, a Rosenwald School is in fairly good condition that they would like to make into a National Historic Site and museum, possibly with a memorial to native son Judge Wendell Griffin. Delight is also the hometown of another famous Arkansan, country

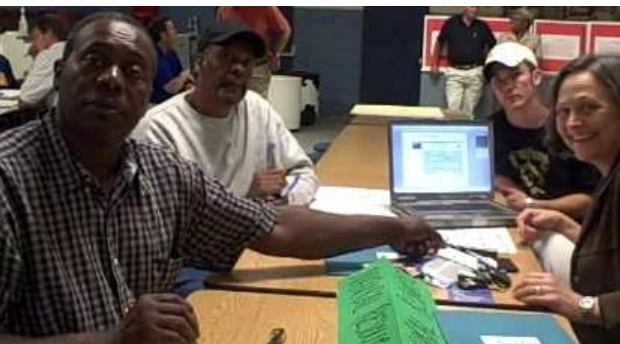


music star Glen Campbell, and town residents have long wanted to develop a Glen Campbell Museum.

At the Community Forum for Assessment, Arts & Heritage Focus group leaders were able to meet with Rachel Silva of the Department of Arkansas Heritage to discuss resources for preserving, celebrating, and capitalizing on the town's cultural and artistic heritage.

### Environment and Natural Resources

Located in the beautiful Wolf Creek Valley between Arkadelphia and the diamond mines of nearby Murfreesboro, Delight has many rich natural resources.



With help from Audubon Arkansas, students have surveyed they area's natural resources, and the Environmental/Natural Resources Focus Group will be working with Audubon's Education Director Mary Smith (above) to find ways to preserve and develop the area's natural resources.

The City Beautification Focus Group will give the town a face-lift by refurbishing empty and run-down buildings and cleaning up empty lots in anticipation of economic growth and cultural revitalization in this "delightful" small town.



## Moorman long-time education activist in Delight

Many small rural Arkansas communities can thank Delight teacher Cyndi Moorman for much of the successful advocacy for rural schools since the historic 2003 legislative session.



Moorman, a 28 year veteran of rural schools, has a master's degree with dual certification in English and social studies.

Moorman says, "I joke to people that my life changed 'when Huckabee spoke.'" She is referring to then Gov. Mike Huckabee's 2003 proposal to consolidate all school districts under in the state with under 1,500 students..

Having been through one consolidation and being in a great school in an economically viable community, Moorman says, "It made zero sense to close [when] closure would throw the rural residents and their economy into a tailspin."

Moorman started Arkansas Citizens United for Results in Education (ACURE), an Internet-based advocacy group of rural citizens around the state. Moorman later merged this group with Save Our Schools to help form the current ACRE organization. She was on the founding board of ACRE and until recently maintained the ACRE website.

Over the years Moorman has been invaluable in analyzing and producing policy papers on education policy in Arkansas, especially regarding the effects on small and rural schools. She produced a White Paper, *From Punishment to Partnership*, an analysis of the education reforms of 2003 and 2004 that suggested the Department of Education should be more supportive of local education efforts, and an analysis of the Omnibus Act, the state's major education accountability measure.

Moorman observes, "Preserving communities is a necessary long-term goal, but it's an elusive one that cannot be achieved if schools in those communities close. My challenge to people who wonder about the value of advocating for the preservation of rural schools is to name one economically viable community that doesn't have a school. Without the rural school and the rural community, the rural way of life will die, and that would be a great loss, even to those who would call it 'progress.'"

(To read more of Cyndi's views and work for rural schools, visit our website at [www.aracre.org](http://www.aracre.org))



Delight ACRE chapter leader Scott Kelton visits with State Representative Randy Stewart about the threat Arkansas Act 60 poses to the school.

Advocates for Community and Rural Education

### Save our schools

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Helping rural schools and communities  
Survive and thrive

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

## Chapter growth in Bradley



ACRE chapter leader in Bradley Brennan Harris reports fantastic growth, increasing from 17 to 33 members in the last three months.

Bradley is well known for parent involvement, with its Very Important Parents support group for Bradley School District.

## Eckert new ACRE organizer for western Arkansas



The newest member of the ACRE staff is Danny Eckert of Delight.

Danny's assignment is organizing and servicing ACRE chapters in western and southwest Arkansas.

Danny is a pastor and father of three school-age children in the Delight School District. He attended a small school and wants to do everything possible to see small schools survive and thrive.

## Singleton at Equal Voice campaign



On September 6 ACRE Lead Organizer Dorothy Singleton attended the Equal Voice for America's Families Convention in Birmingham, Alabama.

More than 15,000 people participated in this event, which was organized simultaneously in Birmingham, Chicago, and Los Angeles by the Marguerite Casey Foundation for the adoption of "a comprehensive approach to the issues and challenges that families face," according to [equalvoice2008.org](http://equalvoice2008.org).

In a collaborative effort, families from across the nation identified the following issues that are important to a better future for America's families: Better and more affordable child care, criminal justice reform, education, employment and job training, health care, housing, immigration reform, and safe and thriving communities.

You can find more details about the Equal Voice Campaign at [www.equalvoice.org](http://www.equalvoice.org).

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