

# Rural Conversations

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

MAY 1, 2013

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## Local Solutions

### *Local Solutions to Local Challenges—*

One-horse towns might also be known as "one-light" or "one-doctor" towns. Many people take pride and enjoy living in rural communities across the state.

Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, maintaining or improving on the local quality of life is becoming increasingly difficult for many rural places. Particularly, obtaining outside resources for local initiatives is becoming especially challenging.

Locally founded initiatives to improve the quality of life have therefore become more and more important. For one town in south-central Texas, a now annual festival started off in 1973 as a strategy to acquire a local doctor.

*The following story is taken, with permission, from the 2013 Fayette County Record Visitors Guide. The original story was written by H.H. Howze.*

### **How Flatonian's Famous Festival, Czihilispiel, Came About**

What's in a name? Take "Czihilispiel" for instance.

The famous chili cookoff and community celebration with the funny name causes newcomers to want to know: Exactly what kind of word is that? "We needed a catchy name," retired 155th District Judge Dan Beck said.

Beck is the man most often given credit for initiating the annual event. "The 'Chilympiad,' one of the original chili cookoffs, was already a big deal."

Chili plus "spiel" (German for "play") was Beck's suggestion. Long-time Flatonian Edwin Zapalac claims credit for the "z" in "czhili." "It acknowledges that there are Czechs as well as Germans in town," he said in a phone call.

Beck wants to set the record straight as to whose idea the first chili cookoff really was: "Mike Herzik was a young lawyer—even younger than me—and he came up with the idea of a chili cookoff to help celebrate the centennial." Herzik was from Praha and

still practices law in Katy, according to Beck, his old employer and friend. "He's done very well as a lawyer—no doubt as a result of the excellent training he got in my office," Beck laughed.

The centennial was a one-time event. Why did the chili cookoff re-appear the next year with the unusual name? "We needed a doctor," Beck said. "Flatonian was a one-doctor town and old Doc Moorehead had died. It was a one-lawyer town too—but there were three of us," he added with a chuckle.

The idea was to raise money to help send a young person to medical school who would agree to come back and serve the town for at least five years.

It worked like a charm. We got a committee together and decided to continue the cookoff and dedicate the proceeds to the medical education of a young woman. She graduated and practiced

***The idea was to raise money to help send a young person to medical school who would agree to come back and serve the town for at least five years. It worked like a charm.***

# 2013 Texas Rural Challenge



## *Texas' Premier Rural-Focused Conference—*

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Texas Rural Challenge is scheduled for June 18-19, 2013 at the Embassy Suites Conference Center in San Marcos,

Texas. The Texas Rural Challenge is the state's premier rural focused conference and provides information, best practices, resources, and networking to Texas' rural leaders.

This year's conference will feature tracks in business and economic development, community development, and statewide issues facing rural Texas with potential topics ranging from finance, youth leadership, community foundations and much more.

In addition, a large number of state and federal agencies, along with private sector partners will host and participate in this event.

This statewide conference is hosted by the Governor's Office, Texas Economic Development Council, Texas Department of Agriculture, USDA – Rural Development, and UTSA's Institute for Economic Development – SBDC Rural Business Program.

Early registration :	\$125
(ends May 10	
Regular registration:	\$195
Non-profits:	\$150
Students:	\$99

For more information please visit:

[www.texasruralchallenge.org](http://www.texasruralchallenge.org) or  
[www.texasedc.org](http://www.texasedc.org).

## Texas Rural Poll

### *Texas Rural Challenge Session—*

A rural-focused roundtable discussion will be held at the Texas Rural Challenge this year. The session will include discussion and questions posed to the audience regarding rural issues.

The audience will be able to vote live on any questions posed to them. With the results immediately available to the audience, a discussion around each of the issues will be facilitated.

Topics that may be included in the discussion include: rural community development, rural economic development (local and state level), natural hazards, rural medical and healthcare, and perceptions of rural and urban living.

In addition to local level leaders and residents, many state agency folks will also be in attendance.

The session will be a valuable source of information for the entire audience.

We encourage you to attend and participate in this

opportunity to better understand rural issues across the state as well as discuss these issues with each other and with state agencies.

The session is scheduled for Wednesday June 19th from 11:00 am—12: 15pm.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Texas Rural Challenge is scheduled for June 18-19, 2013 at the Embassy Suites Conference Center in San Marcos, Texas.

For more information please visit:  
[www.texasruralchallenge.com](http://www.texasruralchallenge.com) or  
[www.texasedc.org](http://www.texasedc.org).

# Challenges for Young or New Rural Leaders

## Session in San Marcos—

At the Texas Rural Challenge this year, the Center for Rural Studies will host a session focused on the challenges and experiences for young or new rural leaders.

The idea for the session came after multiple discussions with new rural leaders across the state who felt unsure about what they were supposed to be doing in their positions. While passionate about their jobs and their communities, these leaders often lack the confidence and direction that comes with experience.

The purpose of the session is to allow rural leaders to share their experiences (good and bad), find commonalities, and discuss possible solutions to the challenges discussed. A network of great resources is intended to be built through the discussion.

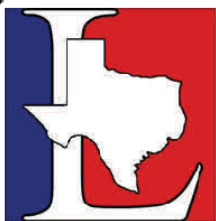
We would like to invite leaders of all ages and experiences to attend and participate. Through an interactive panel and audience, the session will allow participants to share issues that they struggle with on a daily basis. Attendees will walk away with a network of individuals that they can reach out to, ideas for managing issues, confidence in facing

challenges, and multiple resources for community and economic development.

The session is scheduled for Wednesday June 19th from 9:45 to 11:00 am.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Texas Rural Challenge is scheduled for June 18-19, 2013 at the Embassy Suites Conference Center in San Marcos, Texas.

For more information please visit: [www.texasruralchallenge.com](http://www.texasruralchallenge.com) or [www.texasedc.org](http://www.texasedc.org).



Texans in Leadership

## Texas Rural Leadership Program Approaching Leadership Today

June 10, 2013, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm  
Corpus Christi, TX  
Omni Bayfront Hotel

**REGISTER NOW!**

Sessions include:

- Leadership as a Community Asset
- Communicating with Decision Makers
- Building a Shared Vision
- Building Community Engagement
- Developing Community Leaders in Texas

[www.trlp.org](http://www.trlp.org)

## Central East Texas Community & Economic Development Event

August 1, 2013  
10:00 am—2:00 pm  
Sam Houston State University  
CHSS Building—Room 110

**We want to hear from YOU!**

Join us for a discussion about a new rural community and economic development organization in East Texas. Learn how the regional approach can help individual communities grow and prosper, and tell us about your vision for the future of YOUR community and the region.

If you live in or near any of these counties you may be interested in participating in the East Texas event.

If you cannot attend but would like to know more, please sign up for our mailing list on the registration page.



There is no charge to attend, but all attendees must pre-register online at [www.shsu.edu/ruralcenter](http://www.shsu.edu/ruralcenter).

For additional information please email: [ruralcenter@shsu.edu](mailto:ruralcenter@shsu.edu) or call: 936-294-4380.

# Pioneers Youth Leadership

## *Learning-through-action—*



## **PIONEERS**

As a County Judge in a rural part of Texas, I know first hand that smaller communities must be actively engaged in community development, economic development and leadership development in order to stay strong. To meet the need for local leadership development, I helped create Pioneers Youth Leadership, a learning-through-action program for high school students that helps develop today's student leaders and tomorrow's community leaders. By giving high school students leadership training with a focus on making positive changes in their own community, Pioneers prepares students to be more effective future community leaders and helps strengthen communities.

Each Pioneers class spans the course of a year. The current Pioneers class is made up of 24 students in grades 10-12 from 3 high schools in Real County. The participants were selected based on merit and projected benefit of leadership training. There is no cost to any student to participate in the program. The program is funded by Pioneers Youth Leadership, Inc., a non-profit, community supported corporation.

In the upcoming school year, there will be a Pioneers program in Real County and Uvalde County, and we would like to have the

program in at least two additional counties.

In Pioneers, the students identify and create solutions for critical local community issues and needs. The program includes six major events:

1. Leadership Camp
2. College & Financial Aid Advising Seminar
3. Community Project Development
4. Texas Leadership Forum
5. National Leadership Forum
6. Graduation

Throughout the year, the students are given opportunities to learn and apply leadership skills. The Pioneers management team, working with community volunteers, facilitates each event during the year. Along the way, the students identify and develop a local community project with the support of the management team. The students also receive training in leadership characteristics and styles as showcased by local leaders in education, government, and business.

Each element of the program emphasizes the development of ethical leadership and critical thinking skills in the high school students so they are better equipped to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing population, economy and political landscape of our state. Pioneers Youth Leadership's mission is to help high school students realize their potential



to make a positive change in their communities and to sharpen their ability to be effective leaders. The program is founded in the core values of Character, Passion, Teamwork, Service, Discipline, Respect and Persistence.

The students in the current Pioneers class have said that during the last year, their knowledge of the following topics had increased by:

First Impressions:	79.1%
Good Character:	98.4%
Teamwork:	94.1%
Community Issues:	80.8%
Ability to Set Goals:	83.8%

For more information on the program or if you are interested in a Pioneers program in your county, please contact Garry Merritt at (830) 232-6750. More information is also at [www.pioneersyouthleadership.org](http://www.pioneersyouthleadership.org).

*Garry Merritt  
Real County Judge*

**Continued from front page**

medicine in Flatonia for a lot longer than five years,” Beck said.

Czhilispiel’s cookoff started with 10-12 entrants, but grew rapidly. In those days chili cookoffs were in their hey-day. “At one time it claimed to be the second-biggest cookoff in Texas with 150 to 175 cooks,” Beck recalled. He estimated the current number at 50 to 60. Now bands a big draw. There is always lots of music, lots of dancing, and lots of beer. The big show takes a big tent, and Czhilispiel boasts the “World’s Largest Tented Beer Garden.” For

the actual event, “We shut down U.S. 90,” he said. “Arts and crafts and food booths line the streets.” Czhilispiel clearly still brings a lot of welcome cash into the local economy.

Flatonia’s story is not unique. There are numerous towns across the state that have implemented similar initiatives to improve local quality of life. However, in this day and time, with the ever increasing challenges for rural at the state-level, perhaps this local-level thinking to solve local

problems is one that should be employed more often.

*Cheryl L. Hudec, Associate Director, Center for Rural Studies, Sam Houston State University*

# Rural Events

Who	What	When	Where
Texas Association of Non-Profits	<a href="#">Build A Better Network</a>	May 3	Austin
AgriLIFE Extension	<a href="#">Social Media 101- Raising Stakeholder Awareness in an Information Age</a>	May 15	San Antonio
Texas Economic Development Council	<a href="#">Texas Women in Economic Development Conference</a>	May 16-17	Frisco
AgriLIFE Extension	<a href="#">Social Media 101-Raising Stakeholder Awareness in an Information Age</a>	May 23	Houston
AgriLIFE Extension	<a href="#">Next Generation Agricultural Conference</a>	May 23-24	Bryan
AgriLIFE Extension	<a href="#">Promoting Youth Engagement</a>	May 30-31	Online
Texas Economic Development Council	<a href="#">Basic Economic Development Course</a>	June 4-7	Frisco
Texas Economic Development Council	<a href="#">Mid-Year Conference</a>	June 5-7	Frisco
Texas Rural Leadership Program	<a href="#">TRLP Conference Approaching Leadership Today</a>	June 10	Corpus Christi
Texas Association of Non-Profits	<a href="#">Grant Writing Certificate Program</a>	June 10	Austin
Texas Economic Development Council	<a href="#">Economic Development Sales Tax Workshop</a>	July 12	Houston
AgriLIFE Extension	<a href="#">Social Media 101-Raising Stakeholder Awareness in an Information Age</a>	July 18	Austin
AgriLIFE Extension	<a href="#">Next Generation Agricultural Conference</a>	July 18-19	Abilene
University of Texas-San Antonio	<a href="#">Texas Rural Challenge</a>	June 18-19	San Marcos
Texas Economic Development Council	<a href="#">Economic Development Sales Tax Workshop</a>	June 28	Mesquite
National Rural Economic Development Association	<a href="#">Transforming Rural America</a>	July 17-19	Austin
Center for Rural Studies Sam Houston State University	<a href="#">Central East Texas Community &amp; Economic Development Event</a>	August 1	Huntsville

**For a calendar of events visit the Texas Rural Innovators**

events page at [www.ruraltx.org](http://www.ruraltx.org)



# Texas Rural Survey Results

About 90% of respondents felt there were better quality medical doctors outside of their community.

More rural Texans were concerned about drought (84%) than any other natural hazard.

For the full Texas Rural Survey reports, [click here.](#)

## Final Reports—

Rural areas are home to many of the industrial, agricultural, cultural, and natural resources that make Texas a great state. Rural areas are also home to one of our greatest resources – people.

In the summer of 2012, researchers in the Center for Rural Studies at Sam Houston State University surveyed a random sample of 22 rural Texas communities to gather information regarding medical and healthcare services, economic development strategies and efforts, perceptions of rural and urban living, natural disaster issues, public services and amenities, and rural Texas demographics. Understanding rural Texas areas and the perceptions of individuals living in these communities is critical to guiding future development efforts and strategies, along with understanding the different needs of rural communities.

## Perceptions of Rural and Urban Living

Findings from the survey revealed that rural Texans hold positive images about rural people and places and tend to more or less reject negative images. Rural places and communities were regarded as being less stressful, more peaceful and quiet, more neighborly and friendly, more satisfying and wholesome, and having less crime and violence than other places and/or communities. Rural families were viewed as being more close-knit and

enduring than families living in other areas, and rural people were seen as being more likely to accept individuals as they are. An overwhelming majority of respondents were much more likely to disagree than agree that rural people are crude and uncultured and that rural life is monotonous and boring. Most respondents also disagreed that living in rural areas means doing without the good things in society, that rural people are suspicious and prejudiced towards others, and that there are few opportunities in rural communities.

We propose that rural community and economic development professionals might, in certain situations, harness and sell this overly positive imagery of rurality – what other writers have termed the “rural mystique” – and use it to build, revitalize, and/or enhance their local communities and economies.

Outlined below are some general findings from the 2012 Texas Rural Survey.

For the full reports, visit: [http://www.shsu.edu/~org\\_crs/txruralsurvey.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~org_crs/txruralsurvey.html).

These findings, which cover medical and healthcare services, economic development, natural disaster issues, and public services and amenities, can be used to inform rural community and economic development at the local, regional, and even state level.

## Medical and Healthcare Services

Both *availability* and *quality* of healthcare services and providers within the community were of great concern for rural residents. However, levels of concern varied among communities of different sizes and location.

- Only 39% of respondents had a regular healthcare provider within their community.
- A majority of respondents from communities within the population categories of 499 or fewer and 500 to 1,999 reported “no providers in my community” (75% and 61%, respectively).
- 46% of respondents from communities within the population category of 2,000 to 10,000 reported “the quality of providers is better elsewhere.”

Regardless of the size or geographic location of the communities, respondents reported relatively low levels of satisfaction with the quality of healthcare providers and services.

- About 90% of respondents felt there were better quality medical doctors outside of their community.
- More than 70% of respondents felt they needed more primary doctors within their community.
- Only 56% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of the medical and healthcare services within their community.

**Economic Development Strategies and Efforts**

A list of 13 different economic development strategies was presented to respondents.

- 43.8% of respondents were aware that their community leaders have promoted tourism in the community as an economic development strategy.
- The one strategy that respondents were most aware of their community leaders NOT pursuing was the development and/or promotion of retail shopping centers (56.9%).
- The top four strategies perceived to have a positive effect were: (1)

improving access to high-speed internet in the community, (2) developing and/or improving a continuing education program in the community, (3) developing and/or promoting a youth entrepreneurship program in local schools and, (4) developing and/or promoting distance learning opportunities in the community.

- Even though tourism development was viewed as having had or potentially having a positive effect on local economic development, rural residents believe that the pursuit of alternative economic development strategies – such as those listed above – might have

even greater positive effects on their local communities.

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of state support for specific economic development efforts in rural Texas.

- *Leaders* (72.8%) believed that the promotion of tourism in rural Texas should be given the highest priority from the state.
- The *general population* gave “high priority” to: (1) promoting Texas oil and natural gas development (67.5%) and (2) promoting Texas agricultural products (66.9%).

**Natural Disaster Issues**

Measures included in this section were: 1) concern for natural disaster affecting the local community and 2) impression of the community’s ability to recover following a disaster.

- Across the state, residents indicated the highest level of concern for drought, wildfires, and tornado/high winds.
- More rural Texans were concerned about drought (84%) than any other natural hazard.

In the case of drought, flooding, and severe winter weather, the survey data reveal some unexpected findings.

- Concern for drought is widespread in

rural Texas. Even in areas that lacked historical experiences with drought, residents still indicated high levels of concern for this hazard type.

- Residents living in areas with a history of floods indicated relatively low concern about future flooding.
- Concern about severe winter weather was highest in the northern regions of the state, where winter weather has historically occurred. However, historical crop damage resulting from severe winter weather is highest in the south and west. Residents in these regions expressed relatively low levels of concern about severe winter weather.

- Residents of the smallest rural areas seem to be the most uncertain about their community’s ability to respond to a natural disaster.

- 36% of rural residents indicated that their area did not have an emergency management plan. However, verification with county officials confirmed that all counties where these respondents reside do have emergency management plans.

The revelation that most rural residents are not aware of these plans indicates a pressing need to inform rural residents about their community’s disaster preparedness and include them in emergency preparedness initiatives.

In terms of perceptions of community preparedness for natural disasters:

**Public Amenities and Services**

Respondents were presented with a list of 26 public services and community amenities and asked about availability and quality.

- More than 40% of respondents indicated their rural communities did not have child daycare services, public transportation, or mental health services.
- Just under 40% of respondents noted their rural communities lacked nursing home care, and 25% did not have access to senior centers.
- Over 30% of those surveyed reported not having access to arts and cultural activities.
- Roughly 1 in 4 respondents reported that their rural communities did not

have entertainment and youth programs.

- 90% or more of the respondents indicated they had access to restaurants, religious services, housing, internet services, local government, cellular phone services, and adequacy of streets and roads.
- Services such as law enforcement and fire protection services were also reported to be present in rural communities.
- The smallest communities in the study had the lowest access to the measured amenities and services.

The survey asked respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction with the amenities and services for which they did have access.

- Religious services, fire protection, public schools, library services, water service providers, sewage/waste disposal, parks and recreation, and law enforcement had the highest levels of satisfaction.

- Lower levels of satisfaction were found with senior centers, cellular phone service, medical/healthcare services, housing, internet services, dental service, nursing home care, youth programs, local government, child daycare services, and community recycling.

- Community members were most dissatisfied with mental health services, streets and roads, arts/cultural activities, retail shopping, entertainment, and public transportation.

# “Put my ideas in your mind!”

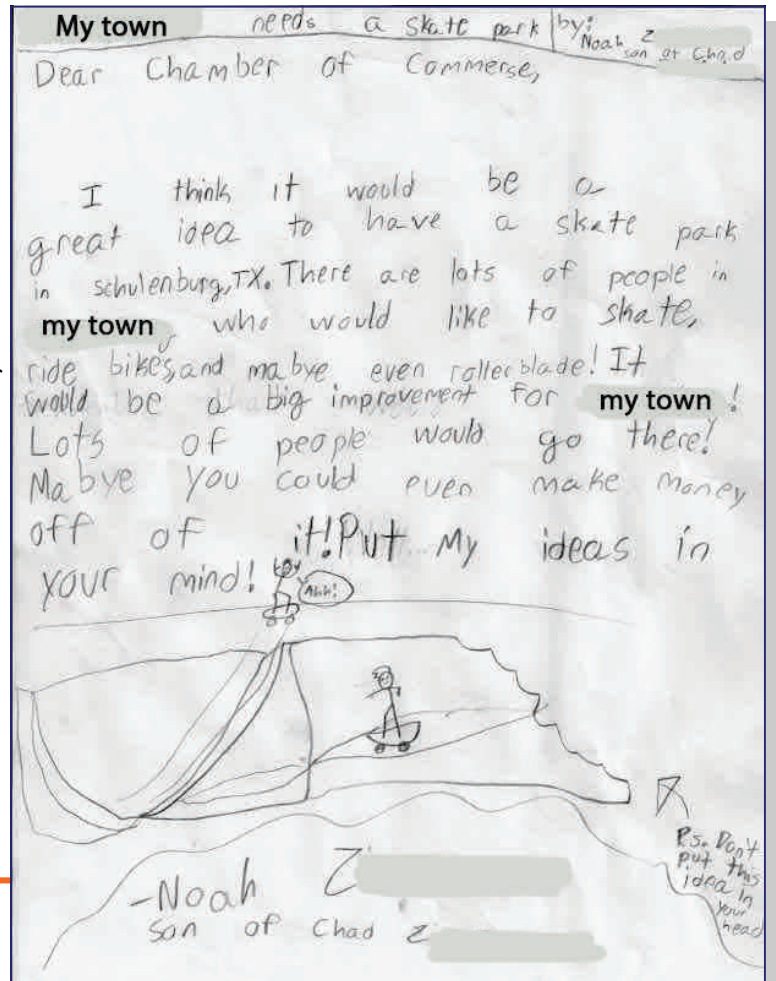
## Inspiration—

The letter to the right was submitted to a local Chamber of Commerce by an elementary student. The young person felt it was important to share this idea with the adults who work at the Chamber of Commerce.

This letter should be an inspiration for many adults who tend to forget that 1) the young people are a valuable resource of ideas and creativity, 2) they are capable of understanding much more than they are given credit for, and 3) they care about their community.

I think Noah Z. says it best with: “Put my ideas in your mind!”

*Cheryl L. Hudec, Associate Director, Center for Rural Studies, Sam Houston State University*







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*The mission of the Center for Rural Studies is to assist in the building, strengthening, and maintaining of rural Texas communities.*

Thank you for taking the time to explore this issue of *Rural Conversations*. Our hope is that *Rural Conversations* will encourage all of us who hold a passion for rurality to work together toward the goal of allowing rural Texas to flourish.

**[www.shsu.edu/ruralcenter](http://www.shsu.edu/ruralcenter)**

If you would like to submit something to be published in *Rural Conversations*, please contact Cheryl L. Hudec, Associate Director of the Center for Rural Studies at [ruralcenter@shsu.edu](mailto:ruralcenter@shsu.edu).

If you wish to be removed from the mailing list for *Rural Conversations*, please email Cheryl L. Hudec at [ruralcenter@shsu.edu](mailto:ruralcenter@shsu.edu).