

# Rural Conversations

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## Rural is Real

**Gene L. Theodori,  
Director, Center for  
Rural Studies—**

On behalf of the faculty, staff, and students affiliated with the **Center for Rural Studies: Research & Outreach** at Sam Houston State University, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the inaugural issue of *Rural Conversations*. *Rural Conversations* will serve as a medium for all things “rural.” Each issue will contain timely and salient information on rural Texas for community developers, policymakers, academicians, Cooperative Extension personnel, and the citizenry at large.

Here at the Center we believe that in an increasingly urbanizing, globalizing, and demographically changing Texas, rural remains *very real and very important*. I personally take offense when I see or hear rural referred to as a residual category – the population, housing, and territory “left over” after the urban is accounted for. Center affiliates feel the same way, and I would surmise that most – if not all – of you do as well.

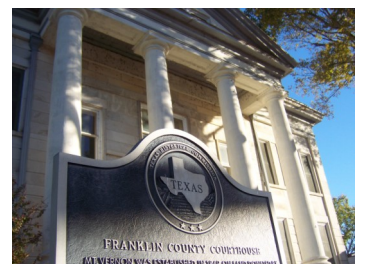
For the millions of Texans who live and work in rural areas throughout the Lone Star State, the challenges associated with rural livelihood remain very real and very important, too. Transformations in economic, demographic, social, and spatial organization have had profound effects on rural Texas.

**“I personally take offense when I see or hear rural referred to as a residual category – the population, housing, and territory ‘left over’ after the urban is accounted for.”**

On average, rural areas within Texas maintain lower per capita incomes and higher poverty, greater levels of aged-dependency ratios with fewer workers to support those over age 65, and lower labor force participation rates than do urban areas. In addition, the quantity and quality of many amenities

and public services are often inadequate to meet the needs of rural Texans. In many rural Texas localities, pressing needs exist for job creation, increased incomes, economic growth, modernization, improved service delivery, business retention and recruitment, and enhanced social well-being.

I assert that purposive, positive, coordinated intervention at all levels – local, regional, state, and federal – is required in order to successfully surmount the structural-level occurrences that have weakened the social and economic fabric of many rural areas in Texas.



**Franklin County Courthouse**

My 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.

A bridge in Canadian, Texas. Taken by a 2010 Texas Rural Intern.



# The New Office of Rural Affairs

**Effective October 1, 2011 - The Texas Department of Rural Affairs became the Office of Rural Affairs within the Texas Department of Agriculture.**

Actions taken by the 82<sup>nd</sup> legislative session resulted in the merger of the State's primary rural service agencies – Texas Department of Rural Affairs (TDRA) and

Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). A transition team comprised of senior managers from each agency has worked diligently to ensure a seamless transition by October 1<sup>st</sup>.

To facilitate the merger, TDA created a new division named the Office of Rural Affairs. This division will have oversight of the State Office of Rural Health and the Community Development Block Grant Program.

The administrator for this division will be Rick Rhodes.

The highest priority for the Office of Rural Affairs will be to deliver programs and services to stakeholders with excellence. Programs are focused on community development, job creation and rural health care.

For further information, please utilize the TDA website: [www.TexasAgriculture.gov](http://www.TexasAgriculture.gov)

Approximately 62 million people –

one in five Americans –

live in rural areas.

Approximately 17% of Texas' 25,145,561 residents live in rural areas—

about 4.2 million people.

## Rural Health

**The National State Offices of Rural Health (NOSORH)**

NOSORH has announced November 17, 2011 as the inaugural National Rural Health Day, which will be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in November every year. This declaration is an opportunity to share your story of the importance and vitality of rural health care in your area. The Texas State Office of Rural Health is working on a toolkit to help rural providers plan and host local events to celebrate their employees, their patients, their boards and their communities.

We want to let everyone in Texas know that we are proud of our rural communities and our rural health care providers.



We and NOSORH want to help the nation understand that rural communities are a wonderful place to live and work, that being a rural health care provider offers tremendous opportunities, and that health care in rural America is more personal and unique.

Stay tuned for more information and a toolkit from the State Office of Rural Health. Also, feel free to visit the national Rural Health Day website at: <http://celebratepowerofrural.org/>

For more information on how you can be involved, please contact Amanda Maedgen in the State Office of Rural Health at: 512-936-6722 or [amanda.maedgen@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:amanda.maedgen@TexasAgriculture.gov)

# Rural Communities - Rural Texas Tourism Center

## ***Building Partnerships Locally, Regionally, and State-wide***

In Landmark Square in downtown Giddings, Texas, a historic railroad depot has been restored to house the ***Rural Texas Tourism Center***. Landmark Square serves as a regional hub for rural heritage tourism, cultural education, and outdoor recreation. The restoration of three depots located in Landmark Square began in 1998 through local partnerships facilitated by Giddings Economic Development Corporation (GEDC). A comprehensive revitalization, development, and restoration plan began in 2006. The project was completed in the fall of 2009 with a total project cost of \$2,282,800, most of which was funded through GEDC.

The depot housing the Rural Texas Tourism Center was the third depot to be restored in Landmark Square. The structure is original, restored with local funds designated for the project and leveraged with grants from foundations and funding agencies. The tourism center is the ultimate rural Texas tourism initiative sponsored through GEDC and endorsed on a statewide basis by governmental agencies, tourism agencies, heritage tourism groups, and rural Texas communities. The Rural Texas Tourism Center serves as a visitors' center that offers a "one stop shop" to showcase participating rural Texas communities, events, sites, and venues. The center is currently facilitated and supported by GEDC and grant funds from a wide variety of sources.

Historic preservation is the background used to facilitate a successful rural downtown

revitalization and a unique sustainable tourism initiative. This project builds on the existing, unique, historic, cultural, natural, and scenic assets of our rural area allowing us to diversify and strengthen our economy while retaining the characteristics making us special.



**The Rural Texas Tourism Center—Giddings, Texas**

Cultural heritage tourism has a tremendous economic impact on the economy. Through economic benefits including new businesses, jobs, and higher property values, tourism adds less tangible—but equally important—payoffs. The Rural Texas Tourism Center is a well-managed tourism program that aims to improve the quality of life as residents take advantage of the services and attractions it adds. It promotes community pride which grows as we work together to develop a thriving tourist industry. The restoration of the three Giddings' depots in Landmark Square is creating an economic boon, enhancing community identity, and establishing a rich and promising heritage tourism opportunity through the Rural Texas Tourism Center.

Cultural heritage tourism is one of the fastest growing markets in the travel industry today. Texas is the second most visited state in the

country for heritage tourists. The heritage tourist market tends to be older, more affluent, and better educated than other tourists. Research also indicates that heritage tourists stay longer and spend 36% more money per trip, excluding transportation costs, than other tourists. The sophistication of this market demands an experience that is authentic, high quality, and in many cases, customized to meet individual interests and needs. Railroad Depots are an endangered historic and cultural treasure – Giddings is unique in having three original depots offering the perfect location to showcase rural Texas through the Rural Texas Tourism Center.



**2011 Texas Rural Intern, Kamesha Walker, inside the RTTC.**

The depots were originally the most significant buildings in Giddings serving as the citizens' commercial and social portal to the world. Today they have again emerged as community centerpieces, reclaimed and reinvented in Landmark Square's unique offering - the Rural Texas Tourism Center.

***“This project builds on the existing, unique, historic, cultural, natural and scenic assets of our rural area allowing us to diversify and strengthen our economy while retaining the characteristics making us special.”***

# Rural Economic Development



South-West Texas Border

## Small Business Development Center Network

Rural Business Program

### *Building Communities through Collaboration*



Palestine Chamber of Commerce

UTSA's Rural Business Program (RBP) is a specialty center affiliated with the University of Texas San Antonio's South-West Texas Border Small Business Development Center Network, a 79-county service area that covers the Gulf Coast of Texas as well as South and West Texas.

Historically, rural communities have been heavily dependent on the farming, agriculture, and energy sectors as their primary economic drivers and for their livelihood. With fewer farmers today, rural communities are facing losses in jobs, population, tax base, and opportunities for youth.

The RBP's focus is to help reverse these trends by providing rural communities and businesses with managerial and technical assistance to help them diversify, grow, develop and create new jobs. We believe that the

***"The RBP has embarked on a Capacity Building and Sustainability training program, to strengthen the capacity of staff***

***of local governments, non-profits and other key stakeholder organizations..."***

foundation for rural economic growth is built on applied research, planning, leadership, and strategic mobilization of resources.

Our aim is to help communities apply sustainable development strategies that increase the economic competitiveness of a rural community or region by utilizing economic research to align business, community, leadership, and workforce development strategies that will create jobs and move a community closer to sustainability.

Gil Gonzalez, Director of the Rural Business Program, states: "Developing the leadership capabilities of our young men and women is the key to our community's future. After spending some time at USDA in Washington, D.C. working with FFA collegiate members from throughout the U.S., the one thing I realized was that many of those young men and women were from small rural

communities who wanted to return home and work. But after graduating from a major university, with a science or engineering degree, there were no jobs for them to return to. These young men and women are the future of these communities and without them our communities fight to survive and not thrive. It's incumbent that community leaders be engaged in developing the future of our youth in our communities before they leave for college, whether they serve as volunteers on non-profits, chambers, city or county projects."

As the RBP completes its second year, we've observed that community and economic development plans end up on the shelf because of a lack of implementation. The RBP has embarked on a Capacity Building and Sustainability training program, *Building Communities through Collaboration*, to strengthen the capacity of

staff of local governments, non-profits and other key stakeholder organizations to ensure the long-term sustainability of our communities.

The RBP accomplishes these goals by acting as a consulting firm for communities and small businesses, providing services for free or at-cost. The program has 12 Rural Business Advisors through 10 field centers in the SBDC region that act as our "boots and heels on the ground," who work with communities to implement and plan for a better future. The RBP leverages assets from within the Institute for Economic Development and UTSA, such as the Colleges of Architecture and Public Policy as well as working with strategic partners to improve rural Texas.

<http://rbp.txsdbc.org>

***"Developing the leadership capabilities of our young men and women is the key to our community's future."***

# Rural Perceptions Survey

**Colter Ellis, Research Associate, Center for Rural Studies—**

Here at the Center for Rural Studies, we are excited to be conducting a survey of rural community leaders. We are interested in your experiences with community and economic development efforts. Your feedback will help us identify issues important to the success

of rural Texas. We are always looking for ways to focus our research, outreach, and education efforts, and your response to this survey will provide us with invaluable information that will help us better serve rural communities.

As part of our ever-expanding capabilities, the information received from this survey could be used to create GIS (Geographical Information

Systems) maps. This will allow researchers, community leaders, and policy makers to further understand the influence of geographic distance from services such as hospitals, grocery stores, and employment opportunities on community development.

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

**Look for our reports to be posted on the Center webpage in early 2012!**

## Rural Events

Who	What	When	Where
Texas Rural Innovators Rural Asset Builders	<a href="#">RAISE Texas Learning Forum and Summit</a>	Nov. 1-2	Dallas
Texas Downtown Association and the Texas Main Street Program of the Texas Historical Commission	<a href="#">Downtown Revitalization Conference</a>	Nov. 1-4	Nacogdoches
Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals	<a href="#">2011 Rural Hospital Information Technology Conference (HITCON) and Tradeshow</a>	Nov. 2-3	San Antonio
Rural Assistance Center	<a href="#">Federal Grants Technical Assistance Workshop</a>	Nov. 8	San Antonio
Texas Association of Non-Profits in Texas	<a href="#">FREE Webinar: Starting a Nonprofit</a>	Nov. 9	Online
Texas Economic Development Council	<a href="#">Webinar: Establishing, Building and Cultivating Relationships for Economic Development Using Social Networks</a>	Nov. 10	Online
Texas Rural Innovators, Ogallala Commons, and Center for Rural Studies	<a href="#">Solving the Brain Drain!</a>	Nov. 10	Fredericksburg
Texas Leadership Institute	<a href="#">Construction Projects – Start to Finish</a>	Nov. 15	Waco
Texas Forest Country Partnership	<a href="#">East Texas Economic Development Summit</a>	Nov. 17	Lufkin
Texas Leadership Institute	<a href="#">Grant Writing for Community Leaders</a>	Nov. 29	Mt. Pleasant
Texas Leadership Institute	<a href="#">Small Farms and Diversified Agribusinesses</a>	Nov. 30	Overton
Association of Rural Communities in Texas	<a href="#">ARCIT Summit: Access to Austin</a>	Nov. 30	Austin
Texas Leadership Institute	<a href="#">Successful Festivals and Events</a>	Dec. 13	Abilene
Rural Texas Tourism Center	<a href="#">Rural Texas Tourism Events</a>	Various	Various

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

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



# Rural Community Development

## *Community-Based Planning— Crockett, Texas*

Members of the Mary Allen Museum non-profit organization stand proudly in front of their beloved Mary Allen College.



*The Mary Allen Museum “will continue to educate, inspire, and enrich lives” as it once did as Mary Allen College.*

The rebirth of this institution could possibly provide an art and history museum as well as an interpretive center, house local artifacts of African Americans, writing and genealogy workshops as well as a library of local African American genealogy. Additionally, the dream includes carrying on the building’s original purpose: to educate, through a children’s learning center and possible technical or vocational classroom space. Economically, the restoration and reinvention would benefit the area, but the most important aspect is that the facility would make visible, a facet of African American history which would continue to educate, inspire, and enrich lives.

The Mary Allen Museum of Art and History, Inc. is a non-profit organization in Crockett, Texas, established in 2000. Since that date, members of the organization have been working

In 1886, Mary Allen College became a beacon of hope in Crockett, Texas, a small rural community in East Texas. Educationally, it was an opportunity for fulfillment and was a way to obtain a better way of life. Architecturally, it was a building unlike any that had been seen by the inhabitants of the area and beyond. One hundred and twenty five years later, no other building overshadows this architecture. It is still

ahead of its time.

Throughout the years, the purpose of the College has been education. Today the hope is to continue with this dream, not only preserving the architecture and history for generations to come, but to educate with a museum of African American Art and History.

diligently and tirelessly to restore the Mary Allen College Building. In 2001, they purchased the property with the assistance of a grant from the Texas Historical Commission. As the proud owners of this great property, members of the non-profit meet monthly to discuss next steps in the restoration.

Most recently, in April, the organization partnered with the Center for Rural Studies at Sam Houston State University to begin a Community-Based Planning Process that would assist them in this venture. During the planning process, Cheryl Hudec, Associate Director of the Center, is facilitating formal discussion around the project, issues, and challenges, and assisting the group and the community with the development of a written comprehensive plan to guide the restoration, public relations, capital campaign, and sustainability plan for

the Mary Allen Museum.

Additionally, the Center has partnered with Vision Bridge Consulting, LLC to provide instruction to the group regarding seeking funding.



**Cheryl L. Hudec, of the Center for Rural Studies is pictured here with members of Mary Allen Museum, Inc.**

Ultimately, participants will partner with the community and use the skills, knowledge, resources, and tools acquired through the planning process to research, review, select, and apply for funding opportunities and implement the developed plan.



**CENTER FOR RURAL STUDIES:  
RESEARCH & OUTREACH**

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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 the inaugural 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.

What you can expect next time: A Rural Grants section featuring available funding opportunities for communities, practitioners, and researchers working with rural issues; a feature on the Texas Rural Foundation; an update on the Community-Based Planning Process in Crockett, Texas; an article on the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC); and another rural community success story.

[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.

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

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