

Rural Conversations

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Rural Leadership Programs in Texas

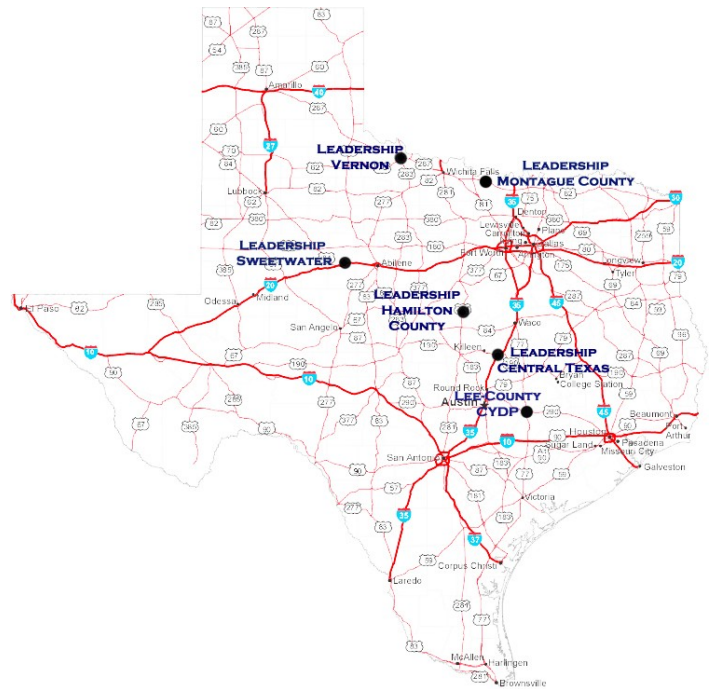
Special Issue—

"Rural community development requires a concerted effort on multiple fronts. Undoubtedly, economic development must be a priority. However, solely focusing on economic development ignores the essential contribution that community structure-building activities – such as leadership development – make to local social, economic, and ecological well-being" says Dr. Gene Theodori, Director of the Center for Rural Studies.

Leadership development is not a new concept for rural communities. We talk about it in passing and at various events and venues throughout the year.

Although I had heard about several rural leadership programs bring implemented across Texas, I wanted to learn more about them and to understand if there were any similarities or differences between them.

I began to tally up various leadership programs around the state. This special issue of Rural Conversations is the first compilation of these rural leadership programs. It is my hope that by reading this



issue, readers will become aware of the leadership activity going on around the state. Additionally, I hope that rural places will see the value in such programs and develop similar programs for their own populations.

In this special issue of Rural Conversations, six leadership programs are featured. Five of the programs are city or county-wide leadership programs. One of these county-wide programs specifically targets in-school youth. The last program featured is a regional leadership program that

involves leaders from multiple counties within the development district. It is one-of-a-kind in Texas and it is my hope that other regions will adopt this new approach to leadership and community development.

These programs aim to build structure in the community and capacity among individuals and therefore make local or regional initiatives more likely to succeed and flourish.

*-Cheryl L Hudec, Associate
Director, Center for Rural
Studies*

Leadership Hamilton County

Keeping what a hometown should be—

Now in its ninth year, Hamilton's leadership class is larger and more respected than ever, and a popular subject of conversation around town.

This year, the Leadership Hamilton (LH) executive committee amended the title

to Leadership Hamilton County (LHC) to encourage participation from people living outside the city limits interested in learning and understanding the operations of local groups, organizations, and governmental entities.

Originally a recommendation of the 2002 "Go Hamilton: Where

Do We Want to Go?" community assessment project, LH was designed to meet the familiar rural need for young, educated citizens interested in keeping Hamilton "what a hometown should be," as our logo suggests.

From day one local Texas AgriLife Extension Agent, Shirley Gerald, facilitated



Downtown Hamilton



Hamilton County Courthouse

the monthly LH sessions. Each class begins in September, with an all-day Saturday retreat. Classes meet at 5:30 every 3rd Tuesday from October through May graduation. Each class meeting features a defined topic planned and led by executive committee members. Invited speakers, both local and from out of town, provide professional level information and allow time for questions. Each year, the class tours the town, businesses, and places of government.

The classes organize and manage at least one project per year. Benefit golf tournaments, bike rides, park labor, community Christmas and Easter projects are a few examples. This year's LHC class held an event in which they smoked and sold hams, invited Santa, and took

They provided voluntary labor to all the above and learned quickly how much fun that is.

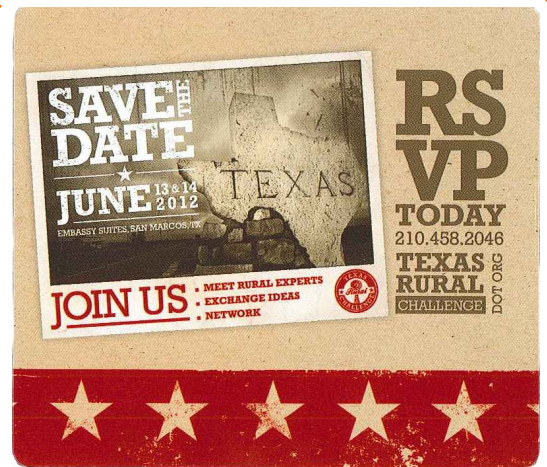
Leadership programs benefit both the community and the individuals who participate. Many of Hamilton's elected officials have been a part of LHC. LH has had participants of all ages, most of whom were previously

photographs of children near their Christmas tree decorating contest to raise funds for improvements to the city's swimming pool and Little League baseball fields.

unaware how valuable their voluntary contributions are to the community. One of the most significant outcomes involves the class members simply getting to know each other and their community better.

Article submitted by Jane Crouch, Hamilton EDC Director

"LH was designed to meet the familiar rural need for younger, educated citizens in keeping Hamilton: 'what a hometown should be'"



Don't forget about the 2012 Texas Rural Challenge!

June 13 & 14, 2012

San Marcos, Texas

Leadership Vernon

Growing their own—

As with many rural communities, population in Vernon fluctuates. With this population shift, it is extremely important to hold on to the existing talent and/or to grow talent within the community. With baby boomers retiring, many years of knowledge and experience are lost. Not only was this a concern in Vernon, Texas but it was becoming apparent that the community needed to “grow their own” talents in the community and gain knowledge from previous leaders.

Leadership Vernon was organized in 2009 by four entities: Business Development Corporation, Vernon Chamber of Commerce, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and Vernon College. Leadership Vernon is an interaction and learning program bringing citizens of Wilbarger County together to develop leadership qualities as they identify and explore local issues and needs.

“It was becoming apparent that the community needed to “grow their own” talents in the community and gain knowledge from previous leaders”

The purpose of the program is to promote and foster the development of community leaders; acquaint participants with the city/county’s assets, needs and

opportunities; provide a forum to discuss community challenges with representatives from industry, government, media and human services; encourage and motivate participants to choose an area of interest for active involvement upon graduation; and build community leaders for today and tomorrow.

With feedback from past classes, the program has grown from a 9 month program to a 14 month program, to encompass additional topics and issues. The program includes a mandatory retreat in which



Dr. Gene Theodori presents on community development to the Class of 2011

personality profiles, community development, and leadership characteristics are discussed. Fifteen selected participants, who come from every aspect of the community, then meet once a month for specific topics such as leadership, medical/social services, local/regional economy, small business/entrepreneurial, environment/agriculture, independent school districts, city/county government, and higher education.

Throughout the program, participants gain an understanding into the workings



The Leadership Vernon Class in Austin

of the city and county through tours, panels, quality speakers, and community practitioners. The program ends with a trip to Austin for a tour of the capital and discussions with state agencies in order to give the participants an even bigger picture of how legislative issues affect rural communities.

Each class is tasked with developing a project for the betterment of Vernon or Wilbarger County. Past projects have included beatification, signage welcoming visitors, and a fall festival. A graduation ceremony is also

held to recognize the group and their efforts. The Vernon community is very proud of the Leadership Vernon program and continues to provide support and guidance.

Article submitted by Shana Munson, Associate Dean, Career & Technical Education, Vernon College



At the retreat: class members drawing the Vernon community as they see it



The class touring the Tyson Food Plant

Leadership Montague County

Stronger together—

Community leadership programs have been very successful across the country. For rural communities, building a sustainable program is always a challenge. The approach in Montague County is to create a county-wide program that not only grows new leaders, but also strengthens relationships among the communities.

"Montague County has about 20,000 people and six major population centers," explains County Judge Tommy Sappington. "There's a lot of history and football between

many of the communities, but we know we can be stronger together than separately."

Conceived during a meeting with local economic development directors, the county judge and the local AgriLife agent, Leadership Montague County has brought together community leaders throughout the county to create and nurture a vibrant program for the future. "We started by looking at other programs in the region, especially Graham and Vernon, Texas," said AgriLife Agent Justin Hansard, who also serves as president of the Leadership Montague County (LMC), a

non-profit. "The effort has focused on developing a program which addresses our own unique history, culture and needs."



Montague County Courthouse

"The effort has focused on developing a program which addresses our own unique history, culture and needs."

The developing organization was aided by a Texas Department of Agriculture student intern for Nocona (one of the county's main population centers), who has a passion for leadership development. "I was part of the leadership program at Austin College," Hillary Lockett, the intern and graduate student at Texas Tech, acknowledged, "and I was really interested about this effort. Seeing a rural county looking to improve its future has been very exciting" Ms. Lockett enlisted the aid of Peter A. DeLisle, PhD,

Professor & Crane Chair in Leadership Studies and Director of Austin College Posey Leadership Institute to assist in surveying county impressions and needs and conducting a variety of team-building exercises.

"Besides the team building, the program being developed includes monthly all day classes on a wide range of subjects," explains Elsie Lacey, secretary of LMC and also a local AgriLife agent. Beginning with a fall retreat, follow-on classes will include local, state and national government; industry and economic development; ethics and education; social services and housing; tourism; communications and marketing; and agriculture and natural resources. Classes

include written information, interaction with various officials and tours of different locations and operations. It is expected that each class will include about 12 to 15 people of various ages, backgrounds, careers from throughout the county.

"We are currently reviewing each program as a class," said Janis Crawley, Bowie economic development executive director and vice president of LMC. "We want to work through the material and ensure the best possible experience for the first class this fall."

For more information contact James Yohe, executive director, Nocona Economic Development at noconaedc@nocona.org.



Leadership Sweetwater

Lasting friendships—

The first class of Leadership Sweetwater was held in 1981. The program, however, was not well attended due to the evening meeting times, and in 1991 the original program was terminated. In 2003, Leadership Sweetwater was revived with a much different format. The sessions are now held during working hours, one day a month, for nine months.

The Leadership program follows the school year, starting with Orientation in September. Orientation enables the group to get to know each other, learn to work together, and depend on each other by working with a ropes course. The Quality of Life Session provides tours of the Nolan County Coliseum, Municipal Auditorium, Library, WASP, and Pioneer Museum. The City-County Session allows the class to attend and be introduced in City Commission, tour the Police Station, Fire Station, County Jail, and observe court proceedings in which inmates are sentenced to prison. That

same session allows the class to tour the Water Treatment Plant and Affluent Water Plant. The Chair of the Economy Session leads the group through tours of U.S. Gypsum, Buzzi Unicem (cement plant), Ludlum's Measurements, an international company that deals with security products, and GE. During the Education Session, the Sweetwater Independent School Administration officials and members of the school board meet with the class, and explain how the education system works in Sweetwater. During this session, the class tours a school property, and travels to TSTC where they are able to participate in several programs including the Wind Energy Program. During the Health Session, the Administrator of Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital offers the group a look into what it takes to keep the hospital budget in the black. The class is able to tour the hospital and a nursing home.

Two sessions are held away from Sweetwater. The class tours Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene and also makes an

“Leadership Sweetwater allows attendees to learn what makes Sweetwater the amazing community that it is.”

overnight trip to Austin where they tour the Capitol, meet with legislators, observe the House of Representatives and the Senate in session, and learn about Texas history.

Graduation for Leadership Sweetwater is held in May, with certificates and notebooks presented. A slide show presentation with pictures from each session highlights the year.

There is a waiting list each year for this Chamber of Commerce sponsored program. Leadership Sweetwater is a very informative program that allows the attendees to learn what makes Sweetwater the amazing community it is. The participants come away with a better knowledge of the City, County, Justice, Education and, Health Systems, and certainly come away with lasting friendships.

Article submitted by Jacque McCoy, Executive Director, Sweetwater Chamber of Commerce.

Lee County Community-Youth Development Program

A youth leadership program—

A major topic in rural community development is investment in local youth. Many rural youth struggle to decide whether to stay or leave their communities. Rural communities across the nation are therefore experiencing a “youth exodus” or, as referred to in the vernacular, a “brain drain.” To accentuate this issue, rural areas face unique challenges including poverty, less diverse economies and labor markets, poor civic infrastructures, and limited educational and career opportunities. With no ready population present to address these challenges, community leaders, practitioners, and policy makers are looking to solve this dilemma. The Community-Youth Development

Program is one potential solution to the “brain drain” being experienced in rural America.

The staff at the Center for Rural Studies identified a demand that needed to be met, and in 2011, developed the curriculum for a Community-Youth Development Program (CYDP) as a part of the Center's mission and services. The overall purpose of the CYDP is to educate youth on the functioning and operations of rural communities as well as engaging youth with the intent of inspiring youth to remain in, or return to, rural America.

In late 2011, the Center approached the Giddings Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and Workforce

Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA) for partnerships in piloting the CYDP in the summer of 2012. Lee County was selected as the pilot site, and the cities of Giddings and Lexington have come forward and agreed to participate. Through the many partnerships involved in this program, the Lee County CYDP goes beyond an ordinary workforce development program and serves as a community development program as well. It not only provides youth with necessary skills but also brings together youth and the community and the community itself.

For more information and updates on the Lee County CYDP see the [Center for Rural Studies' website](#).

Leadership-Central Texas!

Thinking regionally about leadership—

The Development District of Central Texas (DDCT) Board of Directors met in November 2010 to re-group and re-prioritize the goals and objectives for the region. The Board concluded that as a Regional Economic Development Organization, their priority is NOT to do what the local economic

development organizations already do, but to enhance existing programs and to fill in with programs that do not already exist.

Since local leadership and state leadership courses are already offered, the Board felt that regional leadership had not been a focus, and that a regional leadership class that would immediately follow local

leadership development efforts should be offered as an informative and benefit to potential regional leaders.

After much discussion, the DDCT has developed a structured plan for a Regional Leadership Program. The program is being offered to

“The purpose of this program is to train leaders for a regional level of leadership that is sometimes left out of consideration— regional boards and committees.”



Development District
OF CENTRAL TEXAS

“The priority is NOT to do what the local economic development organizations already do, but to enhance existing programs and to fill in with programs that do not exist.”

those who have already taken and graduated from local leadership classes in the counties of: Bell, Coryell, Hamilton, Milam, Mills, Lampasas, and San Saba. The purpose of this program is to train leaders for a regional level of leadership that is sometimes left out of consideration— regional boards and committees.

Classes will meet one day per month, for three months (May, June, July) with certificate presentations given at the Central Texas Council Of Governments Executive Committee in August. Each of these three days is split among various boards and committees in the Central Texas region.

Class objectives include: highlighting opportunities for public service; developing an understanding of the characteristics and skills necessary to assume a leadership role in local and



The classes and certificate ceremony will be held at the Central Texas Council of Governments Building in Belton, Texas

regional community boards and activities; developing knowledge of conducting public/regional meetings; and, developing relationships across the Central Texas Council of Governments Region.

When the three-month program concludes, a list of regional board/committee trained leaders will be generated along with their preferences of boards and/

or committees on which they would like to serve and for which they meet qualifications.

Article submitted by Beth Correa, Regional Economic Development Planner and Environmental Waste Coordinator Planning and Regional Services, Central Texas Council of Governments.

Texas Rural Summit

Rural Texas—Growing Texas

The Texas Rural Health and Economic Development Advisory Council, appointed by Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples last November, will meet in Austin on May 8, 2012. The meeting will take place at the Texas Medical Association Building from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Interactive panel presentations and discussions will address needs and

opportunities in rural Texas related to: economic development, healthcare, workforce development and skills training, and community infrastructure.

The nine-member council is tasked with identifying rural policy priorities and reviewing the effectiveness of existing rural programs. The council also is responsible for developing a Rural Policy Plan to be submitted to the

Texas Legislature on or before Dec. 1, 2012.

There is a fee of \$20 that includes lunch. To reserve your place, contact Rick Rhodes at TDA's Office of Rural Affairs: rick.rhodes@texasagriculture.gov. Click [here](#) for the invitation.

Economic Development

Healthcare

Workforce Development

Skills Training

Community Infrastructure

Rural Events

Who	What	When	Where
Texas Association of Non-Profits in Texas	Nonprofit Outcomes Toolbox: Becoming More Effective	May 1	San Antonio
Texas Association of Non-Profits in Texas	Grant Writing Certificate Program	May 14-18	Austin
Texas Leadership Institute	Business Assessment Matrix	May 16	Beeville
Texas Association of Non-Profits in Texas	Nonprofit Sustainability: Making Strategic Decisions for Financial Viability	May 22	Austin
Texas Leadership Institute	Construction Projects from Start to Finish	May 22	Bastrop
Texas Leadership Institute	Land Development Financing: Tax Increment Financing	May 23	Giddings
Texas Association of Non-Profits in Texas	Effective Grant Writing	June 5	Austin
Texas Leadership Institute	Ten Best Practices for Effective Board Operations	June 7	Abilene
UTSA Institute for Economic Development	Texas Rural Challenge	June 13-14	San Marcus
Texas Leadership Institute	Ten Best Practices for Effective Board Operations	June 20	Mt. Pleasant
Texas Leadership Institute	Business Assessment Matrix	June 26	Waco
Texas Association of Non-Profits in Texas	A Project Management Approach	July 12	Austin

For a calendar of events visit

the Texas Rural Innovators events page at www.ruraltx.org



Rural Perceptions Survey

Providing representative rural data for leaders and residents—

“The findings from the Texas Rural Survey will be a valuable tool for state legislators, state agencies and organizations, and rural leadership”

There are many state agencies, interests groups, and non-profit organizations working to improve the viability of our rural areas. One key challenge these groups face is a lack of reliable, representative, regionally and locally specific data identifying the populations that need assistance most.

These organizations often draw on government data collected in the U.S. Census

or by other state and federal agencies monitoring labor statistics, economic development, education, and health, just to name a few. These sources of secondary data lack the detail needed for decisive policy actions as they are collected with a narrow focus and rarely include input from actual rural residents.

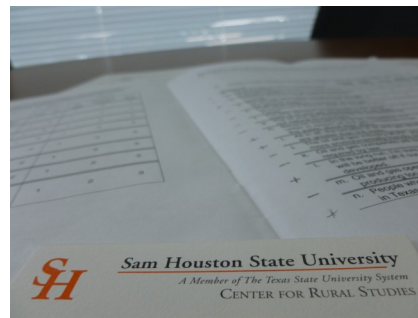
Research indicates that rural communities continue to face significant challenges including depressed economies, high

poverty rates, limited access to healthcare, and lower education levels, among many others. While some state and federal agencies provide data to policymakers at the state and county level, these secondary data sources are not designed to provide the regional and local-level information needed to accurately guide policy decisions intended to improve rural Texans’ standard of living.

In response to the limitations of state and federal data, many states with significant rural populations have instituted annual, or semiannual, surveys that address issues key to improving rural livelihoods. For example, Nebraska’s Center for Applied Rural Innovation, the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania regularly conduct statewide surveys. These data have proven invaluable for policy makers and local stakeholders alike.

In the summer of 2012 the Center for Rural Studies at Sam Houston State University will be distributing a statewide survey of rural Texans: the Texas Rural Survey. This proposed survey is a first step in bringing this kind of sophisticated, scientifically

rigorous, and regionally focused survey to Texas.



The research involves collecting detailed, local-level data from the seven regions of Texas designated by the Texas Department of Agriculture, providing a scientifically robust account of the state of rural Texas.

The goal of the study is to advance our understanding of the state of rural Texas by identifying relevant factors pertaining to health, immigration, the availability and adequacy of

government services, access to information technology, public perceptions of natural resource use, and other issues pertinent to public policy.

The findings from the Texas Rural Survey will be a valuable tool for state legislators, state agencies and organizations, and rural leadership as they work to better utilize the human and natural resource capital residing in rural Texas.



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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 special issue of *Rural Conversations* on Rural Leadership Programs. Our hope is that *Rural Conversations* encourages 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

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.

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