



# THE RURAL TEXAN

Volume 4, Issue 1

OFFICE OF RURAL COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Winter 2007

## At Issue: Bringing New Business Opportunities Home

Attracting new businesses and industries to your rural community requires a robust array of community assets, including quality healthcare, sound infrastructure, good schools and a skilled workforce. To achieve results, a strong network of public and private stakeholders must work together to recruit employers to the community.

### ORCA Helps Rural Texas Build Community Assets

#### Strong Communities Invite New Business Development

By Michael Waters, Chair, ORCA Executive Board

Although many rural communities are great places to live and raise a family, businesses and industries may view rural communities as difficult places to maintain a productive workforce. Underdeveloped and insufficient community resources, rather than rural location, may be to blame for this perception.

#### Community Assets

Workforce, infrastructure, housing, healthcare systems, recreational facilities, natural resources and schools can all be community assets, or they can be weaknesses.

Businesses need a community with strong assets to support a skilled

workforce. In fact, a strong base of community assets is a prerequisite for economic growth.

***"A strong base of community assets is a prerequisite for economic growth."***

#### Rural Viability Index

For rural leaders, it may be difficult to know which community assets are thriving and which need improvement. ORCA can assist communities in evaluating their assets through the agency's Rural Viability Index, a self-administered scoring process available online at [www.orca.state.tx.us](http://www.orca.state.tx.us).

In addition, our programs and services are designed to help rural leaders strengthen their community assets and prepare for economic development.

The agency's programs are structured to address the unique challenges that rural communities face, either by providing technical advice and training, grants and loans, or referrals to other additional resources.

ORCA has always worked with rural communities to help them achieve their community and economic development goals.

*Continued on back page...*

### Resource Guide

#### Taking Stock of Rural Texas

Your small town Main Street may be just the way you like it, but is it fit for business? Employers considering moving to your city may turn a harsh eye on its workforce, healthcare systems, infrastructure and other community resources. If lacking, such resources may in fact be barriers to economic development.

ORCA's Rural Viability Index is a practical tool designed to assist rural community leaders in identifying community assets and weaknesses and making informed decisions about their future quality of life. ORCA initiated the development of the Rural Viability Index in 2003, so that rural Texans could measure the future survivability of their community through a self-administered scoring process.

The George Bush School of Public Affairs at Texas A&M University further developed the project and identified 10 community indicators as critical factors in the survivability of a local community. The indicators in the index are demographics, economy, education, environment, government, health, housing, society and culture, technology, and transportation.

An initial assessment of 148 rural communities in Texas, conducted by the George Bush School of Public Affairs, found that 22 percent of sample cities scored 68 or above, 42 percent of cities scored 55 or above, and 36 percent scored less than 55.

To identify community assets and weaknesses and help prepare the community for economic development opportunities, ORCA recommends that rural leaders complete a survey of their communities to assess the strength of local Index indicators.

For more information about the Rural Viability Index, visit ORCA online at [www.orca.state.tx.us/index.php/Community+Development/Rural+Viability+Index](http://www.orca.state.tx.us/index.php/Community+Development/Rural+Viability+Index).

### Kingsville: Community Partnerships Drive City's Economic Transformation

By Julie V. Kelly, ORCA

No relationship is without value for the Greater Kingsville Economic Development Council (EDC). By working to foster a strong community network with private and public institutions and businesses, the City of Kingsville has built impressive momentum behind the wave of economic development that is transforming the area.

"In the last five years the number of jobs has gone from 12,500 to 17,000, according to State numbers," said Dick Messbarger, Executive Director of the Greater Kingsville EDC. "That's better than a 30 percent increase."

#### Stretching a Small Budget

Kingsville relies on its network of community partners to squeeze as much recruiting power as possible from their \$144,000 budget.

Private entities contribute 60 percent of the EDC's total budget, with the City of Kingsville and Kleberg County chipping in 20 percent each, but it's the extra help from community partners that brings tangible results to Kingsville.

Like last year, when King Ranch solved a transportation hitch for the City by using its corporate jet to fly in representatives from an insurance company interested in moving to Kingsville. The EDC was able to recruit the company, bringing more than 200 employees to the area.



Global Contact Services (GCS), a call service center specializing in the insurance and financial industries, hired 200 full-time employees soon after opening its first Texas-based office in Kingsville. GCS also has offices in North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

#### Changing Perceptions About Kingsville

In a rural community, every new job and industry that comes to town gives a boost to existing businesses and organizations. As the success of industries operating in the area has grown, Kingsville's reputation has changed.

Once considered a poor location for business, Kingsville is now known as a center-point from all area border crossings. The city is situated between San Antonio and the Mexican border, with

fast access to all ports of entry from Laredo to Brownsville, plus highway, rail and air port access.

"One of best selling factors for new business recruitment is the success of businesses that are already here," noted Messbarger.

Kingsville's next challenge is to build enough housing to keep new employees in the city and harness the tax revenues that go hand-in-hand with new jobs and a growing population.

The Greater Kingsville Economic Development Council is a non-profit corporation funded by private and public dollars. Visit them online at [www.kingsvilleedc.org](http://www.kingsvilleedc.org), by email at [edc@kingsville.org](mailto:edc@kingsville.org), or call 361-592-6438.

### Additional Resources

The following newsletters provide helpful information to community leaders, business professionals, entrepreneurs and others interested in rural economic development. All are available at no cost to subscribers.

#### EntreWorks Insights

Reports on business trends, policy issues and other topics concerning economic development. Published monthly by EntreWorks Consulting. Subscribe at [www.entreworks.net/cgi/news/signup.html](http://www.entreworks.net/cgi/news/signup.html).

#### Rural Entrepreneurship News

Summarizes developments in the field of rural entrepreneurship. Published monthly by RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. Subscribe at <http://team.energizingentrepreneurs.net>.

The Small Business Administration publishes newsletters for small business owners. Subscribe online at <http://web.sba.gov/list/>.

#### Advocacy Newsletter

Timely report for small business owners, policy makers, chambers of commerce and others.

#### Harlingen District Newsletter

Provides Harlingen Texas small business resource partners with information on SBA programs and small business news.

#### Houston ENews

Practical information for those in business or looking to start a business.

## ORCA Helps Rural Communities

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The agency has created or retained nearly 5,000 jobs in rural Texas since January 2002, and has awarded 1,232 grants (totaling \$345,550,998) to 692 rural communities and counties to assist with community and economic development needs.

Retaining healthcare workers in rural Texas continues to challenge many communities, yet without access to quality healthcare, new businesses will have little interest in bringing jobs to the community.

As the State Office of Rural Health, ORCA has helped nearly 70 rural hospitals to continue to serve their communities through the Critical Access Hospital designation.

The agency has awarded more than \$8.3 million in grants to public and nonprofit hospitals through its Capital Improvement Loan Fund to improve healthcare infrastructure and services.

ORCA has also created jobs by recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals to serve rural communities, and has awarded 1,145 grants to 572 rural communities and individuals.

Since it began in 2002, the agency's support has helped rural Texans improve their communities, and ORCA remains committed to serving rural communities across the state.

However, the key to bringing new businesses and jobs to rural Texas lies with community stakeholders.

Existing businesses, local governments and all public and private entities concerned with economic development must aggressively prepare the community for jobs that have yet to arrive. This requires not only financial and technical support, but a community-wide determination to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of success.

### Braggin' Rights

Does your rural community have an economic development success story to share? ORCA would like to feature your story in *The Rural Texan*.

Please email a brief description of your story to [orca@orca.state.tx.us](mailto:orca@orca.state.tx.us). Include "success story" in the subject line.



*Where rural Texas comes first.*

As the state agency dedicated solely to rural Texas, ORCA makes the broad resources of state government more accessible to rural communities. The agency ensures a continuing focus on rural issues, monitors governmental actions affecting rural Texas, researches problems and recommends solutions, and is a coordinator and provider of rural-focused state and federal resources.

***"The economic value of small towns comes from all areas of the state and spans multiple economic sectors. For all their contributions, small towns are constantly challenged to remain viable in a quickly changing world. Fortunately, the State of Texas helps small towns transform their economies and remain valuable assets to Texas through the programs offered by ORCA and other state agencies."***

Charles S. (Charlie) Stone  
ORCA Executive Director

*The Rural Texan* is a free publication of the Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA). To subscribe, call ORCA toll free at 800-544-2042 or email Julie V. Kelly, Editor, at [orca@orca.state.tx.us](mailto:orca@orca.state.tx.us).

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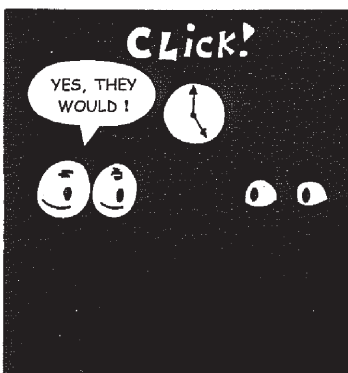
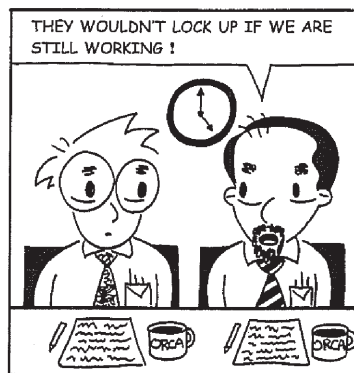
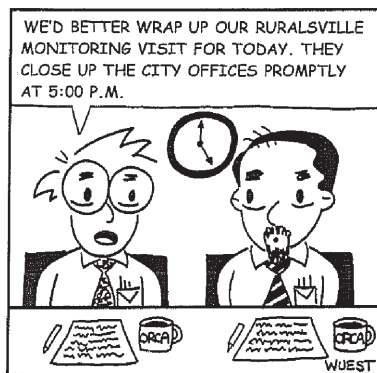
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## ORCA's Mission:

"To assist rural Texans who seek to enhance their quality of life by facilitating, with integrity, the use of the resources of our state so that sustained economic growth will enrich the rural Texas experience for the benefit of all."

## Rural Laughs



By Robert Wuest, ORCA

## 2007 Executive Committee Meetings

April 5-6	Austin
May 31-June 1	Pittsburg
July 26-27	Austin
October 4-5	Ozona
December 6-7	Austin

Executive Committee meeting dates and locations are subject to change. Please visit ORCA online at [www.orca.state.tx.us](http://www.orca.state.tx.us) to confirm times. Meeting agendas are set one week prior to each meeting and are posted online.

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## Rural Economic Development News from ORCA!

Original coverage of emerging rural economic development issues

Related funding opportunities

Case studies & success stories

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***"Many rural communities have taken the bull by the horns when it comes to economic development, but many more are still struggling. To build real economic prosperity, rural leaders must aggressively prepare their communities for jobs that have yet to arrive."***

Michael Waters  
Chair, ORCA Executive Committee

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