



Strategies

for Sustainable Small Town and Rural Development

A number of factors challenge our small towns. Manufacturing operations that would have sought a low-cost location in a rural community 25 years ago are now locating their plants offshore. There are fewer job prospects, and small communities are losing key segments of their population, particularly younger adults. Yet, small towns and rural areas still have an attraction, and many are responding with a new approach to economic development. They are focusing on creating businesses and jobs rather than just hoping to attract them, and finding ways to make their towns unique and inviting as places to live and work.

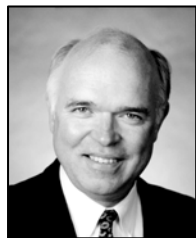
To support the retention and creation of enterprises in its smaller communities, Consumers Energy, a Michigan-based utility, engaged six leading experts in contributing to a series on strategies for sustainable small town and rural development. Each approached a question on how small towns could be successful from their own unique perspective. The responses of these contributors are highlighted here, on the reverse side, and featured in detail on Consumers Energy's website: www.consumersenergy.com/econdev.



Jack Schultz shares 25 trends he believes will help shape the future of small towns. He sees the communities that recognize these trends and are able to adapt will be those charting a promising course for the future.



Oscar Rodriguez recognizes the strong draw one's hometown has for those who have lived or visited there, but have now moved away. Engaging these "alumni" is valuable in increasing your town's footprint in the world and expanding its economic reach.



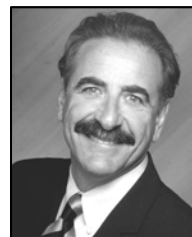
Milan Wall's Heartland Center for Leadership Development wondered why some towns prosper while others struggle. The group undertook an observation of the characteristics of those who appear to thrive. The results are the Center's *20 Clues to Rural Community Survival*.



Christine Hamilton-Pennell offers ten suggestions for getting town's "economic gardening" initiative going. She sees the need to get nontraditional groups involved, groups who also have a stake in a strong economic base.



Luther Snow sees the glass half-full with an asset appreciation concept that urges communities to focus on what they have, not fret about what they lack. Asset-Based Community Development looks for new ways to connect existing assets as a means to create new development.



Ernesto Sirolli sees tremendous potential in the skills, dreams and passions of the people in your town. The ability for these people to pursue their ambitions and create livelihoods can profoundly change the fortunes of a community.

For more information on promising strategies for small towns and rural areas, contact Consumers Energy's Economic Development group at econdevelop@consumersenergy.com or 800 331 9366.