



Louisiana

Community Development Training Sparks Great Potential in Louisiana Agents

Recognizing the Need

In 2000, only a handful of Louisiana faculty were specialists in community development. Aware of the need for further community development education in their state, those specialists asked the administration of the Louisiana State University AgCenter for permission to organize community development trainings for Louisiana agents.

One of the specialists, former AgCenter employee Deborah Tootle, said the trainings were the catalysts for bringing the state's agents up to speed with community development.

The 2000 Community Development Institute, held by the Southern Rural Development Center, was the first such training the Louisiana agents attended. Held in Canton, Miss., in June 2000, the Institute included presentations on various community development topics such as sustainable development, asset mapping and business retention and expansion.

"None of these agents had any background in community development," Tootle said. "They went to this first seminar and learned the basics. They learned a lot about leadership, different strategies and some of the techniques they could use in their own communities."

She also said the Institute gave the agents a really good feel for the work they were going to be doing through the AgCenter. "Without that foundation, they would never have been able to see the overall picture," Tootle added.

Far-Reaching Success

Since that training, two agents went on to get doctorates in education, specializing in leadership. Seven agents finished specializations, which built capacity in the AgCenter to do community development work throughout the state.

"To me, that ability to start building capacity in our state was critical," Tootle said. "That in itself is a success story as far as I'm concerned."



Quick Facts:

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Two of the 2000 CDI participants went on to earn their doctorates in education, specializing in leadership.



Seven of the agents who attended the 2000 CDI finished their specializations in community development, building capacity in the LSU AgCenter to do community development work throughout the state.

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– Deborah Tootle, Former LSU AgCenter Employee

The success of the training reached even further. Two projects in particular were true indicators of the value of community development training to Louisiana. The Delta Outdoors and Wildlife Association came to life when producers faced going out of business because of marginal lands. If their lands were not good for farming, they were good for hunting and wildlife activities.

Agents worked with these producers in creating a nonprofit organization that would promote recreation, conservation and rural tourism in Louisiana. The Association, which quickly included more than 50 landowners, generated a big boost in rural tourism for the state and is still going strong in its promotion of wildlife, scenery and Southern hospitality.

Another project, Louisiana Delta 65, was started to promote rural tourism along U.S. Highway 65 in Louisiana. Representatives from five parishes teamed up with community development agents to form this nonprofit organization in hopes of showcasing the many tourist attractions found along the 117-mile stretch of highway.

Parishes that traditionally did not work well together set aside their competitiveness in efforts to improve tourism for the state as a whole. The result was a group of rural communities working together to showcase the unique rural heritage in Louisiana.

In addition, community development agents worked closely with community recovery after the devastating 2005 hurricane season – yet another indication of the value of community development training.

A Positive Partnership

Community development training in Louisiana has certainly paved the way for numerous successful endeavors. Agents continue to do quality rural development work throughout the state, including work in leadership, entrepreneurship education and workforce development.

Tootle said she believes the LSU AgCenter’s collaboration with the SRDC has had positive effects for rural and community development in Louisiana, and the educational foundation the agents received at the SRDC’s 2001 training was truly a stepping stone for the great things in which they have become involved.

“We would never have been able to do any of this if it hadn’t been for the SRDC,” she said. “Their trainings have really made a difference.”

For More Information:

LSU AgCenter

P.O. Box 25203

Baton Rouge, LA 70823

225-578-4161

225-578-4143 (fax)

<http://lsuagcenter.com>

Delta Outdoors & Wildlife Association

P.O. Box 381

Winnsboro, LA 71295

318-435-7551

<http://www.deltaoutdoors.org>

Louisiana Delta 65

114 North Cedar Street

Tallulah, LA 71282

318-574-2465

<http://www.ladelta65.org>

Deborah Tootle

Former LSU AgCenter Employee

dtootle@uaex.edu

501-671-2228

501-671-2046 (fax)

Southern Rural Development Center

Lionel J. Beaulieu, Director

ljb@srdc.msstate.edu

Box 9656

Mississippi State, MS 39762

662-325-3207

662-325-8915 (fax)

<http://srdc.msstate.edu>