

Miner County gains national attention with WSJ article

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Miner County Community Revitalization, its successes and struggles were the topic of front page news in the Wall Street Journal that day.

The article took a look at what's happened in Miner County as it struggles to reverse the trend of a shrinking population with the establishment of niche markets like organic beef and wind energy generation.

Since that day, the group has heard from people in 29 states, said MCCR Executive Director Randy Parry.

"We were excited about that," he said. "It's truly amazing. There have been a wide number of people who've been calling."

Parry said his office has heard from former Howard students, businesses, people looking to move to a rural area and venture capitalists.

"We were happy with the response," he said.

Parry said the variety of e-mails and calls that came to his office took them by surprise, but "hearing from the corners of the country is gratifying," he said.

The article sparked the interest of newspapers and other publications as well. The Wall Street Journal article was highlighted in South Dakota Magazine and Miner County was the topic of an article in the Denver Post, along with other publications and radio shows.

"It's amazing. There are so many people out there," he said. "It's good to get a little positive (response) sometimes."

Parry said the attention has led to invitations to talk about the issue of what's happening in rural areas and what things can be done.

Calls have come from people interested in organic beef and renewable energy, people interested in buying homes and people who want to come back to a rural area and have some peace and quiet and be a citizen of a rural community.

Parry said the response has been "truly amazing. But a lot of it is keeping it up."

People have called asking for help with their community, Parry said, and that's where the Rural Learning Center starts working.

The Rural Learning Center is a separate office that has been working with a number of smaller communities to address similar issues in those communities.

Parry said the Rural Learning Center has also been swamped with calls.

Overall, Parry said, he is simply amazed at the power of that one article.

"It's created a larger awareness of the work we are doing, and I think it's springing some hope that work is happening toward revitalizing and stabilizing the erosion of rural communities," he said. "It's brought in support and ideas from people not only in rural but urban settings."

The article has also expanded MCCR's ability to go out and meet with entities doing similar work.

"This work is extremely important for declining Midwest and rural communities. Hopefully it'll start picking up and catching on," he said. "By doing the work positive things can happen."

For a revitalization effort to take hold, Parry said the important thing is to take grasp of opportunities and be strategic.

"Without strategy and vision you don't know where you're going," he said.

Some of the important things MCCR has learned, Parry said, include the following:

-- There must be a vision for the whole community, not just the leaders.

-- Community transformation must be multidimensional not one dimensional.

-- It is important to build wealth and community, not just wealth.

-- There must be cooperation among organizations, not

consolidation.

-- There is a need for regional connections not a community in isolation (communities have to reach out and work together).

Parry said the article was definitely a good thing.

Not only was it good to speak to people from other parts of the country and get their points of view, but it is also encouraging that there are people in the urban areas that are saying maybe they should move to the rural areas, he said.

"It's exciting for all rural areas, not just Miner County," he said. "There is hope communities can stabilize and possibly grow."

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