

CITY-REGION STUDIES CENTRE

europa

MAGAZINE

PLACES | SPACES | PEOPLE

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 2 | 2011 \$9.99



RURAL FUTURES

Water for
the Future

Where We
Live Shapes
How We Live

Up in Smoke: The
Emergency Facing Fire
Services in Rural Areas

Overcoming the Peaks
and Valleys of Resource-
Dependent Economies

Arts and Culture:
A Rural Perspective



Global Expertise. Local Strength.

In simple terms, the world of Stantec is the water we drink, the routes we travel, the buildings we visit, the industries in which we work, and the neighbourhoods we call home.

Stantec is One Team providing Infinite Solutions.



4004-100-0011-1000231111



IBI Group is a multi-disciplinary practice providing integrated land and infrastructure solutions for the public, private and institutional sectors.

The best urban environments are created when an imaginative and appropriate design approach has been consistently applied to the relationship between buildings and the streets, squares, parks, water features and other spaces which make up the public domain.

- Real Estate Research
- Economic/Financial Analysis
- Land Use Planning
- Civil Engineering
- Surveying and Mapping
- Water Resources Management
- Urban Design
- Public Outreach



Offices throughout Canada, the USA, Europe & Asia.
For more information please visit:

www.ibigroup.com

URBAN LAND FACILITIES TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

STRIP / APPEAL

reinventing the strip mall

an architecture and design competition.

strip appeal

Strip Appeal is an ideas design competition and travelling exhibit intended to stimulate and showcase creative design proposals for the adaptive reuse of small-scale strip-malls.

we ask

How might the small-scale strip be reinvented and redeveloped to local advantage? Simple and sturdy, what better adaptable typology than the small-scale strip. Any community can make the small-box their own.

the brief

We invite you to identify ailing strip-malls in your local neighbourhoods and apply your creative ideas for their esthetic reinvention and adaptive reuse.

got a great idea?
visit www.strip-appeal.com

competition deadline:
November 30, 2011



**CITY-REGION
STUDIES CENTRE**

- 03 CURB APPEAL**
New Rural
by Rob Shields
- 04 PLANNING**
Where We Live Shapes How We Live
by Emily Huddart Kennedy and Naomi Krogman
- 06 COMMUNITY**
How a Northern Rural College Responded to Students and Communities in Crisis
by Heather Smith
- 08 SUSTAINABILITY**
Water for the Future
by Rick Overwater
-
- 10 RURAL FUTURES**
Up in Smoke: The Emergency Facing Fire Services in Rural Areas
by Melissa St. Dennis
- 12** Chauvin: Linked to the Past, Looking to the Future
by Moira J. Calder and Mary A. Beckie
- 14** Overcoming the Peaks and Valleys of Resource-Dependent Economies
by Jim Sellers
- 16** Wind Power, Locomotives and Community Leadership in Rural Alberta
by Brad Dollevoet and John R. Parkins
- 18** Arts and Culture: A Rural Perspective
by Alison Baird
- 20** Soggy Southeast Saskatchewan During the Summer of 2011
by Barret Weber
- 22** Rural Caregivers: Supporting the Support
by Carlene Van Brabant

TOPICS

FEATURES



NEW RURAL

Rob Shields

In this issue, we turn the spotlight on rural Alberta – a complex region where traditions of homestead self-sufficiency meet global resource demands. The one constant in the rural experience has been change, including powerful changes in landscape: deforestation, depletion of glacier-dependent rivers and lakes, sudden and dramatic changes caused by wildfire and floods. The most effective responses to these environmental changes depend on local ingenuity, frequently in the absence of provincial or federal support, because of the uniquely place-based challenges communities face.

Industrialized agriculture, resource extraction and the businesses that service them have tested the resilience of rural communities. In this issue, writers explore the challenges rural communities face in trying to deliver essential local services such as water supply, emergency response, and arts and culture programs. Other jurisdictions – the North, the Prairies, the western United States – face similar challenges.

Rural municipalities and institutions are often criticized as bastions of tradition and as being resistant to change. However the research of the City-Region Studies Centre and the work supported by the Alberta Rural Development Network find that rural communities and institutions are also sources of innovation. As the articles in this issue suggest, partnerships are being forged between local actors and different levels of government. This resourcefulness is also part of Alberta's rural society and builds a culture that contributes to the staying power of communities.

CURB MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER

Rob Shields, Director
City-Region Studies Centre,
University of Alberta

EDITORS

Howie Phung, Senior Editor
Karen Sherlock, Copy Editor

ART DIRECTION

John Smith, Art Director
Yvonne Lee, Contributing
Art Editor

EDITORIAL BOARD

Sara Dorow, Kevin Jones,
Merle Patchett, Howie Phung,
Rob Shields, Maryanne Wynne,
Peter Yackulic

CITY-REGION STUDIES CENTRE

Faculty of Extension -
Enterprise Square
2-184, 10230 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, AB, Canada
T5J 4P6

Email: crsc@ualberta.ca
Phone: (780) 492-9957
Fax: (780) 492-0627

www.crsc.ualberta.ca
www.CurbMagazine.ca



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EXTENSION

WHERE WE LIVE SHAPES HOW WE LIVE

Emily Huddart Kennedy
and Naomi Krogman

When my grandfather was growing up in Edmonton in the 1920s, his family lived in Mill Creek, a small neighbourhood located minutes away from downtown, the University of Alberta and Whyte Avenue, another centre of commercial activity. His father built the family home in 1918, worked as a janitor at a nearby school and ran a market garden a few blocks away. The life of the Dunn family – and their many neighbours – was completely independent of the automobile for the 30 years they lived in Mill Creek.

Fast forward to 2010: Mill Creek is still within walking distance of parks, schools, grocery stores, public transit, bakeries,



Edmonton, Alberta – University of Alberta

restaurants and, of course, the university, Whyte Avenue and downtown. But property values are much higher and homes for sale are fairly rare. So where is a middle-income family, perhaps new to the country (like the Dunns), going to move? What is our generation's answer to neighbourhoods built to fit the needs of young families?

Given decades of academic research and on-the-ground learning about urban planning, climate change, peak oil and social capital (the bonds of trust and

reciprocity that build community in our neighbourhoods), the results are disappointing. New neighbourhoods are often built several kilometres away from the city core, devoid of local, independent retail, serviced with infrequent public transportation and characterized by quickly built, impersonal homes, fabricated water features and shadeless trees. It would appear that on the trajectory towards creating livable neighbourhoods that align with social priorities and integrate environmental features, most Canadian cities are moving backwards. Not only do suburban and urban neighbourhoods look different on the surface, household routines function differently as well.

Between 2009 and 2010, a small team of researchers in the University of Alberta's Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology and the Department of Sociology conducted a study to examine the impact of where people live on sustainable consumption patterns. We began by interviewing families that were all striving to consume less; with the interview results in hand, we identified two neighbourhoods to examine with a comparative survey. We surveyed 491 households in Mill Creek and Terwillegar Towne, a suburb constructed in 2000 that is 15 kilometres from downtown Edmonton.

What we found was that the daily routines of the suburban families were far more resource-intensive than those of families in the central neighbourhood. Both areas have a small contingent of households that are conscious of keeping their environmental impact low, but, for the most part, these households are rare. Environmental sociologist Michael Bell, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, has stressed that we need to find ways for people to live environmentally without trying. That means workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods must be designed to encourage sustainable practices if we expect people to reduce their environmental impact. Yet the growing

reality is that suburban neighbourhood design demands that people try very hard to live environmentally.

To illustrate, our study looked at vehicle ownership and use. In short, people in the suburbs had more vehicles and drove them more often. In Terwillegar Towne, most households had two vehicles. In Mill Creek, most had one – and 13 had no vehicle at all. Suburban residents drove more than twice as far as urban residents each day; in Terwillegar Towne, the average length of commute was 29 kilometres, compared to 12 kilometres in Mill Creek. It comes as little surprise, then, that our study also found 37 per cent of suburban residents felt they spent too much time commuting, while only 23 out of 257 Mill Creek households felt the same.

Time spent commuting offers a good explanation as to why so few people in Terwillegar Towne used any mode of transportation other than the single-occupancy vehicle. Forty-five per cent of central urban residents said they left their vehicles at home when they went out to work or shop, while only nine per cent of those in Terwillegar Towne did the same. Sixty-three per cent of urbanites relied on a vehicle to commute to work, in contrast to more than 90 per cent of suburbanites.

We have presented these results to academic audiences and government employees, and we often receive the same question: "Well, yes, but aren't there just 'suburban' people and 'urban' people? Who's to say that if they lived in an urban area, the suburban resident would give up their second car?" Using the data we collected with the survey, we built a statistical model to predict what kind of household would be classified as "sustainable consumers." We included environmental attitude, education, income and neighbourhood. While a participant's attitude towards the environment was significant, neighbourhood of residence continued to be a strong



Edmonton, Alberta – University of Alberta

predictor of whether a person was a sustainable consumer.

Quite simply, by building neighbourhoods that are far from the workplace, leisure activities, shops and services, we are making it awfully difficult for neighbours to get to know one another and build the social networks necessary to share ideas about how to live well and reduce one's environmental footprint. Suburban residents, by essentially being forced to drive, spend a great deal of time commuting that could otherwise be used for visiting with neighbours, growing a garden, sharing food and other resources with friends and neighbours, and other pursuits that are socially and environmentally meaningful. Moreover, we are placing excessive pressure on the environment by contributing to higher greenhouse gas emissions and, in general, worsened air quality. If Canada is going to follow its federal government's commitment to curb greenhouse gas emissions by 240 million tonnes by 2012, we need a "new" model of urban design.

So, let us pose the question: what kind of neighbourhood is successful in creating norms and routine behaviours that are compatible with efforts to reduce human impact on the environment? And more crucially, how do we create such neighbourhoods?

Successful urban design would likely return to many of the planning principles inherent in Mill Creek, built over 100 years ago. Much greater scrutiny would be applied to developing suburban neighbourhoods like Terwillegar Towne, given the increasing evidence of the environmental costs of such housing developments. Mill Creek was built before the automobile ruled our urban landscapes, and that is a principle of sustainable design: planning as if the single-occupancy vehicle is a luxury, not a necessity.

We should also learn from over a century of research and experience by acknowledging the new pressures and opportunities at the household level. These pressures include large numbers of people looking for affordable housing, smaller families and fewer intergenerational households. A corresponding principle then, is thinking beyond the single-family, detached dwelling to consider mixed-stock housing, such as co-housing, multi-family housing and mixed commercial/residential. New pressures also include resource scarcity and declining social capital. Collaborative consumption, or sharing what we have, is a great way to address both demands. Car sharing and community gardens are two examples being adopted by some forward-thinking communities (see the Village on False Creek in Vancouver, www.thevillageonfalsecreek.com/sustainability.aspx).

Often, it is residents who lead forward-thinking initiatives. While that is impressive and inspiring, there is a clear role for municipal, provincial and federal governments to play. A primary reason is one of equity: wealthier neighbourhoods, where residents have leisure time and discretionary income, have far fewer barriers to designing vibrant neighbourhoods than those where residents have little time, money or political access.

Environmental policy to date often expects the individual to be a leading driver of change. Yet it is pointless to ask individuals to drive less when sprawling neighbourhoods with little access to shops or services are built in the hinterlands of our metropolitan areas. This kind of urban design places an indefensible burden on urban residents, future generations and the environment. Our findings also suggest, as other studies have found, that such suburban neighbourhoods often fail to meet the needs of most residents and that many promises of "new urban design"

do not materialize as promised for those who buy a suburban home.

As has been the case since the Dunn family raised my grandfather in Mill Creek, neighbourhoods are places where friendships form, routines are established and many people spend the majority of their time. Surely, we do not want to leave the vision involved in designing

If Canada is going to follow its federal government's commitment to curb greenhouse gas emissions by 240 million tonnes by 2012, we need a "new" model of urban design.

future neighbourhoods solely in the hands of developers. Various levels of government, but particularly those closest to neighbourhood planning, should create public and political space to address the role of housing, given its relationship to energy use and collective well-being. Finally, it is time we take seriously the power of neighbourhood contexts to promote long-term commitments, at the political and household level, to living more sustainably.

Emily Huddart Kennedy is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Alberta. Her research examines sustainable consumption at the level of the household and city-region.

Naomi Krogman is associate professor of environmental sociology at the University of Alberta. She studies sustainable consumption, local organization around environmental problems and resource management, and environmental policy implementation.

HOW A NORTHERN RURAL COLLEGE RESPONDED TO STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

Heather Smith

Northern Lakes College prides itself on having close ties to the more than 30 communities that host its campuses in north-central Alberta. This was never more true than on May 15, 2011, and the days that followed.

As several wildfires swept through northern Alberta and threatened the communities of Slave Lake, Atikameg, Cadotte Lake, Driftpile, East Prairie, Gift Lake, Loon River and Peerless Lake, Northern Lakes College quickly changed its operating priorities to address critical logistical problems and, most importantly, the needs of those whose lives were so deeply affected. When the situation surrounding the Town of Slave Lake, in particular, became precarious, people turned to their local campus, a designated evacuation centre, to seek information and take shelter.

College president and CEO Rick Neidig was working at the Grouard campus, about 92 kilometres west of Slave Lake, on Saturday, May 14, when he began

monitoring the situation in the town. He remained in touch with emergency operations officials, though at the time it was not expected that the situation would escalate to the point that the campus in Slave Lake, about 200 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, would become a crisis command centre.

Reflecting on the events a month later, Neidig says it was logical to use the resources of the community college to support the communications of emergency personnel during the crisis by providing equipment and space to run emergency operations. “The college had everything required for response teams to carry out their operations, and it could be all under one roof,” he says. “In times like these, a college can become a community focal point and make all the difference to a community facing survival.”

Communications Were Vital

All official college updates and notices about campus operations began to flow

from the president’s office on the evening of May 15. To avoid adding to growing misinformation about the crisis, the college directed evacuees to existing phone numbers or websites for emergency information, instead of passing on the information second-hand.

The college switchboard, normally located in Slave Lake, became the responsibility of the High Prairie campus, 116 kilometres west. What usually required only one person now needed four to manage the volume of calls from staff, students and the public. The college’s Facebook page also became an essential source for information, especially for those who could not access their college email readily.

While news of the devastating fire was being reported across the country and around the world, college management in neighbouring communities was struggling to locate staff and students just kilometres away. To accommodate the college’s emergency operations, the Grouard campus became a communications hub: the finance department handled calls from staff while student services focused on student needs. It took several days, but all displaced staff and students were located and, if at all possible, spoken to – a remarkable feat given the challenges during those first few days.

When the fire came within three blocks of the Slave Lake campus, facilities staff removed the college’s main server cluster, which included over \$100,000 worth of equipment. The complicated process of reconnecting the server normally takes a week, but IT staff worked around the clock to reconfigure the network and routing from memory in just 12 hours.

Slave Lake, Alberta - Tim Horseman





Slave Lake, Alberta – Beverley Stone

Operations Continued at a Difficult Time

In the days that followed, fire personnel began to control the fires, and the immediate threat was over. But the college and the displaced communities faced many challenges, particularly in Slave Lake, where one-third of the town had been destroyed.

The college decided immediately that the welfare of employees and students was to be the first priority. "The trauma that comes from this type of disaster is significant and has to be taken into account right from the beginning," says Neidig. "Any business objectives, regardless of what they are, are not as important as the impact on the people that work for you and those that receive your services. As an organization, we have to be able to adapt without putting undue pressure on those affected by the disaster."

Multiple programs were rearranged to accommodate displaced students. The Boom Truck program was relocated to Grande Prairie so students would not miss classes. Slave Lake Adult High School students were exempt from writing diploma exams. Online courses were cancelled for a week while the college located instructors and readjusted. Considerations were given to every program and then communicated as quickly as possible to students and staff.

Staff in admissions and human resources, who normally work from Slave Lake, had to relocate to other campuses where space was available. Courier operations were halted because the vehicles were inaccessible in Slave Lake, so staff hand-delivered living allowance cheques

from Alberta Works to students in evacuation centres. Amazingly, more than a few staff who had lost their homes continued working to make sure students were accommodated and arrangements made to complete their coursework when the time was right.

The college convocation had been scheduled for June 3, but after the student association requested a postponement, the convocation and the nursing capping and pinning ceremony were rescheduled for a later date. This was not an easy decision to make, considering the planning that goes into the event, but it was evident students could not be ready or appreciate convocation on the original date, and the college opted to be flexible.

People Caring for People

In the days following the wildfire, the college was overwhelmed by the generosity of individuals, communities and its Campus Alberta partners, who offered assistance to college staff, students and communities.

Internally, employees were feeling helpless to support their colleagues affected by the tragedy. The college's 30 campuses are spread throughout a region bigger than Canada's Maritime provinces. While this might seem like a barrier to creating unity within the college, it is actually what creates such a close bond among employees.

In a unique and touching way, the college community came together to comfort friends and colleagues who lost their homes. A few days after the fire, several people led a group of secret quilters to make quilts for those who lost their homes.

For about a month, the quilts travelled all over the region. Some people made a quilt for the first time; others donated fabric that had sentimental value; those who couldn't sew ironed pieces for the quilts. It was nicknamed the "Journey of the Quilt" and became a wonderful travelling quilting bee.

In times like these, a college can become a community focal point and make all the difference to a community facing survival.

In total, 24 handmade quilts were created and adorned with a custom-made label that read: "A quilt to warm your body and comfort your soul, from your friends at Northern Lakes College, 2011." When the quilts were shared in a surprise presentation at the year-end staff meeting, it was both an emotional and uplifting experience for everyone in attendance. As one person who was there said, "Distance in our institution just brings people closer together."

Those who call the North home are strong and resilient. As a true northern community institution, Northern Lakes College will continue to follow that lead in the months and years ahead, as it rebuilds together with its community.

Heather Smith takes great pride in being part of the team at Northern Lakes College and actively promotes its programs and courses throughout northern Alberta.

WATER FOR THE FUTURE

Olds College wetland and garden project promises to provide a fountain of information about water access and sustainability

Rick Overwater

During the past summer, a casual glance over the northern fence of the Olds College campus in central Alberta would have revealed what appeared to be a vast BMX terrain park. But while there is no doubt that the carefully constructed berms and 20 ideally shaped basins would make an extreme cyclist's paradise, bigger things are afoot. When construction is completed this

benefits, not to mention the wide range of people and communities that will see a positive impact, is almost staggering."

Just about everyone Risi speaks to, he says, has his or her own "Aha" or "I didn't know that" moment. "For example, a lot of people know there is a requirement to replace any rural wetlands that are removed when a new subdivision is built at the edge of a city. What they don't know is

A lot of people know there is a requirement to replace any rural wetlands that are removed when a new subdivision is built at the edge of a city. What they don't know is that the retention ponds that are often put in their place, despite having plenty of greenery and wildlife around them, have no ecological benefit as functioning wetlands.

December, the 21-acre site in Olds, 95 kilometres north of Calgary, will be known as the Botanic Gardens III and Treatment Wetlands. The \$6.8-million, world-class research and education complex promises many benefits to students, the community and the Canadian watershed.

Easily visible from Highway 27 as visitors enter the town of Olds from the east, the site will include naturalized landscapes, specialty gardens, walking trails, demonstration plots, an arboretum and 20 constructed treatment wetlands and display ponds. A public gazebo, amphitheatre, interpretive centre and specialty event areas will help broaden the wide spectrum of uses for the community.

Ken Risi, director of development at Olds College, has a considerable amount of sweat invested in the project, now six years in the planning. It's an endeavour, he says, that investors, the public and government stakeholders have found easy to get behind. "The number of potential

that the retention ponds that are often put in their place, despite having plenty of greenery and wildlife around them, have no ecological benefit as functioning wetlands."

Water for Life

That's an important distinction. Wetlands are a key component of the environment's ability to store and purify water, yet 70 per cent of Alberta's historic wetlands are already lost due to agricultural, oil and gas, industrial and residential development. One of the myriad anticipated outcomes of research at the college's wetlands and botanic gardens is to figure out how to best mitigate that loss and how to accurately reproduce the traditional functionality of natural wetlands in a man-made version. When complete, the research will offer urban and rural developers alike a ready-made blueprint for environmental restoration.

The impetus behind this research stems largely from the Alberta government's

Water for Life strategy (www.waterforlife.alberta.ca), introduced in 2003, which sets forth the goal of ensuring that Alberta maintains "safe, secure drinking water, healthy aquatic ecosystems and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy." Within that framework is the Wetlands Policy, which outlines a number of strategic directions with outcomes ranging from an increase in voluntary stewardship to the creation of specific information, tools and programs for effective protection, conservation and restoration.

Many aspects of the Wetlands Policy will be addressed through research at the site. "We have a dozen clearly documented goals that range from providing a living laboratory for our environmental, agriculture and horticulture students to drought-proofing our own campus," says Risi. "Many of them focus on public and industry education. Others are a lot more tangible and hands-on."

In an increasingly green-minded society, it's those practical applications that are expected to draw public interest. For example, the project's treatment wetlands and display ponds will not only be able to store water and allow for uses such as irrigation, they will also remove sediment, contaminants and undesirable nutrients. A prime example is the treatment of high-saline waste water from swimming pools and coal bed methane facilities. After the waste water – often too high in





Olds, Alberta – Olds College

saline content for human consumption or introduction back into the environment – moves from a holding tank through a desalination unit, it enters the series of treatment wetlands. Once the particulates within the water have settled out within the initial wetlands, it continues moving through the series where there are aquatic plants selected for their ability to remove nutrients such as nitrates, phosphorous and other contaminants. The “polished” water can now be stored in a final holding wetland, where it can be used for irrigation.

These methods also promise potential solutions for oil and gas industry waste, agricultural industry runoff and storm water management. Within the processes, there will be more research to optimize results. Extra hydrogen produced from the desalination system, for example, will be evaluated as alternative fuel. According to Dr. Abimbola Abiola, director of applied research and lead scientist at the Olds College Centre for Innovation (OCCI), that’s just one of the many aspects of wetlands usage being looked into.

“We know for a fact there are plants that will remove components such as nutrients

from waste water,” says Abiola. “But we are still determining exactly which plants are best for certain applications. As well, while there is some existing research into this field, there is very little that is specific to the Canadian climate, and that is another factor we will be investigating.”

Abiola is considered a scientific leader in environmental microbiology. Besides acting as head of the OCCI, the college’s state-of-the-art applied research facility, he is also involved in integrated waste management projects, environment and agriculture in over a half-dozen countries, including China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan and the Dominican Republic.

Collaboration is Key

Two other key players are involved in the development of the project, a complex feat of engineering and water management involving several thousand feet of underground pipe, pumps and more: Henry Heuver, president of Foothills Landscaping, and Dennis Westhoff, president of Westhoff Engineering.

Heuver was one of the first visionaries to help bring the concept of a constructed wetlands into the planning stages, donating countless hours of his time and landscaping expertise, as well as significant funding. Westhoff, a senior water resources engineer, is a leader in storm water management in Alberta and introduced the first storm water management wetland in the City of Calgary. He has since incorporated eight wetland systems into residential and commercial developments.

“We have indeed been fortunate to have the right combination of expertise,” says Abiola. “From microbiology to soil compaction, and construction techniques to water-flow engineering and more, a combination of disciplines has been a prerequisite. I expect that when the results of our work are replicated elsewhere in the future, people like Henry and Dennis will be very important.”

Behind those three key figures, numerous other partners are in the background, many with large contributions in their own right. Organizations involved in the project include Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Red Deer Watershed Alliance, the City of Calgary, the Town of Strathmore (where a smaller subsidiary pilot project is underway), the Government of Canada, the provincial government and more. A number of organizations and donors, some anonymous, have stepped in with funding for the gardens and wetlands.

“I think the number of people so willingly involved in something this large really speaks to its importance and the many, many benefits it will present for the environment and society,” says Risi. Just as important, he feels, is that the gardens and wetlands will be located within a populated centre and serve as an attraction and a gathering area.

“It’s important the people see this as not only vital to our survival and well-being, but that it can be incorporated into our world and actually enhance our day-to-day lifestyles.”

Rick Overwater is a communications coordinator, Advancement, at Olds College.

Olds, Alberta – Olds College



Up in Smoke: The Emergency Facing Fire Services in Rural Areas

Melissa St. Dennis

Imagine that you are driving down Highway 63 towards Fort McMurray, Alberta. Curving left and right, the highway follows the contours of the land. The sun is past its peak and casts a soft glow on the green leaves and needles of the birch and pine. You notice the wildlife: a deer, a fox, even a moose at the far end of a field. Admiring the freedom you feel out here in the country, you drive the speed limit and shake your head at the vehicles whizzing past, heading north and south.

Around the upcoming corner you see a semi and a pickup driving toward you – one in each lane. One in your lane. With only slight hesitation, you decide to risk hitting the ditch rather than the oncoming vehicle. The wheel cranks to the right, and your car flies off the road. When the motion stops, you cannot feel your feet. Panic and adrenaline surge throughout your body. Suddenly, you remember that the nearest emergency responders, volunteers from the local fire department, have ceased operations. You hope that the second closest is on its way.

Almost all rural municipalities in Alberta rely on volunteers to provide fire and emergency services. Though some larger towns and smaller cities have one or two paid positions, the major part of the workload, from firefighting to highway accident response, is carried by volunteers.

The Wandering River fire department in east-central Alberta is one example.

Wandering River, 95 kilometres north of Athabasca and 200 kilometres south of Fort McMurray, is one of few communities along Highway 63, the only all-season road to Fort McMurray. The highway is often called “Suicide 63.” Thousands of people drive it each day, many in big industrial vehicles, all in a hurry to make money in the oil-rich region. According to a CTV report in October 2008, police issued around 4,500 tickets during a nine-month period, mostly for speeding and reckless driving. On average, this highway triggers a road accident once a week; nearly once a month, it claims a life.

Until recently, seven volunteers made up the Wandering River fire department. They were on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and were trained to fight fires in Wandering River and the surrounding area. They were also required to act as a first-response team for a 200-kilometre stretch of highway between Grassland and Mariana lakes. With 70 per cent of emergency calls related to highway response, the five women and two men in the fire department often travelled more than an hour away from the community they live in. Though the provincial government allocates \$500,000 annually for regional firefighting training, the Wandering River

team was not formally trained in emergency response and, therefore, is not allowed to transport accident victims. Instead, they wait at the scene for EMS responders to arrive and are usually left to clean up after the victims are taken away. Each member of the department has tales of accidents that would make most people ill; the after-effects were draining and drove many volunteers away after their first calls.

Rural Fire Departments Losing Pressure

In a 2010 report, the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association pointed out that so few people were volunteering for fire departments that some municipalities had notified citizens that emergency services would only be

Almost all rural municipalities in Alberta rely on volunteers to provide fire and emergency services.

available during evenings and weekends. For the Wandering River fire department to be stable enough to provide community service, it needs at least 10 members. With a population of 400 people, that means 2.5 per cent of its population. If Edmonton expected the same percentage to



Fort McMurray, Alberta – Nathalia Riordon

volunteer, it would need at least 25,000 volunteers — that's 10,500 more than all of the paid and volunteer firefighters working in the province today.

Wandering River faced enough of a challenge trying to find more volunteers to provide services at home. But with the added responsibility of a highway that takes these volunteers away from their families and jobs once a week, the town was struggling to recruit and retain volunteers.

In May 2011, a firefighter recruitment and retention tool kit was published by Volunteer Alberta for the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association; the Government of Alberta contributed \$50,000 to the creation of the tool kit and has promised another \$36,000 in the coming years to help the association implement

strategies outlined in the publication. But despite the newly available information and techniques, the fire department in Wandering River still could not find the capacity to continue its role.

So, in June 2010, Wandering River fire chief Sheri Johnson announced the suspension of fire and emergency services for the town and the highway. Since then, the fire departments in Grassland (half an hour south of Wandering River) and Wood Buffalo (two hours north) cover most of Highway 63.

Ten months after the suspension, the Government of Alberta and Athabasca County announced they are partnering to improve driver safety and enhance emergency services in this region. A five-year contribution of \$1.3 million (\$800,000 from the province and \$500,000 from the county) will enable Athabasca County to hire up to four full-time emergency responders, develop a regional approach to fire and emergency response, and purchase portable speed-indicator devices to alert drivers approaching emergency scenes.

The county has leased an old forestry site in Wandering River as the site of the paid emergency service. This location has office buildings, room for training exercises, and housing options if any of the paid members are not from the community, though it is hoped that at least some of the paid positions go to residents, to better benefit the local economy. Hiring is expected in late fall 2011, but the exact makeup of the service is still to be determined. Will there be four full-time firefighters, a larger number of part-time or on-call members, or a combination of paid and volunteer?

First Paid Service in Rural Alberta

Twenty-four per cent of Alberta's firefighters are paid an average of \$62,000 a year. The remaining 76 per cent are paid nothing or

earn a small honorarium. These volunteers can also claim the new \$3,000 national tax credit, which amounts to about \$6 an hour if a volunteer works 10 hours a week, not counting time on call.

To ensure Wandering River's paid service is sustainable, the provincial government and the county are working with a consultant on developing partnerships with other local municipalities, such as Lac La Biche and Wood Buffalo, as well as industry stakeholders. "This is a new initiative for the province," said Ron Jackson, director of agriculture and emergency services for Athabasca County. "The Alberta government has never provided funding for a paid force in a rural community, and we want to make sure that this is a sustainable success."

In the meantime, Wandering River is expected to find enough volunteers to resume the community fire service and assist the paid emergency response team once it is active. Training was to begin in June 2011, but some new volunteers were unable to attend due to work and other commitments, so the startup date is uncertain. With destructive fires in nearby Slave Lake and other areas still a vivid memory, local residents are feeling the effects of the uncertainty.

Wandering River's situation is extreme, but all rural communities that rely on volunteer firefighters need support to keep their local fire services in place.

If the local and provincial governments and industry can collaborate effectively, the new initiative in Athabasca County may be a precursor for a new emergency service model in rural communities. But for now, it is a small drop in the bucket for a province with many highways to protect and fires to fight.

You are pinned upside down in your seat. Finally, sirens of the new paid emergency service sound in the distance and you breathe a sigh of relief. Help is here. But what if you had been driving on Highway 40 or 16, where fire and emergency services still rely on volunteers? What if help had come too late?

Melissa St. Dennis, a soon-to-be graduate of MacEwan's professional writing program, is the communications officer for the Alberta Rural Development Network, an organization committed to enhancing the quality of life in rural Alberta.

Grassland, Alberta – Government of Alberta





Chauvin: Linked to the Past, Looking to the Future

Moira J. Calder and Mary A. Beckie

Chauvin is an east-central Alberta village of about 320 people whose livelihoods depend on agriculture and oil. It was settled more than a century ago as a hub for surrounding farms, with a grain elevator and a location on the main east-west CN railway line. Boasting five softball diamonds, Chauvin at one time also hosted a major annual tournament, but now, like many other small, resource-based communities, it is battling rural decline. Five years ago, as Chauvin was beginning to address its long-term viability as a community, two things happened. First, funding to alleviate a nationwide urban “infrastructure deficit” became available through the federal-provincial Gas Tax Agreements (GTAs). To be eligible for the funding in Alberta, municipalities had to have sustainability plans (MSPs). Second, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA), whose leadership was already interested in environmental issues, quickly adopted the concept of sustainability planning. To support its members in this process, AUMA developed a guidebook, which was piloted in 2007 with five small urban municipalities. Chauvin was one of the communities selected to take part in the program, which provided support in developing a dialogue-based, participatory approach to sustainability planning. In addition to accessing infrastructure funding,

the village used the opportunity to draw on other resources that helped it to re-vision and revitalize the community.

The AUMA planning guide was based on a framework developed by The Natural Step (TNS), a non-profit organization founded in Sweden in 1989 to research and promote dialogue on sustainability, which now has offices in 11 countries (www.naturalstep.org). The TNS framework is based on sustainability principles: reducing and eventually eliminating our dependence on heavy metals, fossil fuels and synthetically manufactured chemicals that persist in the environment; ending the destruction of nature and natural processes; and enabling people to meet their basic human needs. Guided by these principles, community members develop a shared vision for a preferred future and then decide collectively how to move forward strategically, step by step. Community development officers from Alberta Municipal Affairs (now under Culture and Community Spirit) supported pilot towns and villages through the planning process, assisting in building local knowledge and capacity. Speaking at the Taking the Next Steps Conference (www.augustana.ualberta.ca/research/centres/acsrc), held in 2010 at the University of Alberta, village administrator Shelly McMann said that initially, “to us, sustainability meant ‘staying alive.’ We were (and still are) looking to attract more

businesses and residents to Chauvin. When we started into the process, we were not fully prepared for the concept of sustainability as in the Natural Step’s program. Along the way, we realized that both concepts are closely linked.”

Once the village council lent support to the MSP — and community members emphasized the importance of village council’s involvement and support — the first step was to identify and educate local leaders, who then formed a citizens’ advisory group. In addition to training workshops conducted in the village by community development officers, representatives of the pilot communities had opportunities to gather and share knowledge at events hosted by AUMA. Development officers also connected the community with external expertise when requested; for example, when the hardware store closed, they arranged a workshop on starting and operating a co-operative. Gradually, Chauvin’s citizen advisory council took over the leadership role. As one community development officer said, “They were educating each other ... the group got more creative and more creative as we went along.”

Community asset mapping revealed a number of features that spoke to a rich history but also opened the door to new endeavours — the historic gas pumps on



Chauvin, Alberta – Jim Henry

Main Street, the elementary/high school, Chauvin's location along migratory bird routes, the softball diamonds and sand dunes that might be developed along with the golf course. It also gave citizens a forum to talk about their values as a community, and they identified talents among the people that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. The citizens' advisory group collected input from the community and surrounding area by handing out cards at the local restaurant and at an annual barbecue, asking people to write or draw the future they saw for Chauvin. Students participated at their own session. Not all comments were positive, but all were considered.

The 250-odd cards were sorted and analyzed at a weekend workshop and produced the vision, "Chauvin is the community of choice to live, grow, work and play!" Participants sorted the comments according to the five dimensions of sustainability outlined in the AUMA guide: environment, economy, culture, society and governance. Ten goals were identified, and people chose the task force they wanted to work on based on interest. One of the first projects implemented was a recycling program that included electronics. The village also provided incentives to stimulate housing development in Chauvin. More recently, the fire hall, which serves a number of surrounding communities, has been rebuilt, and homes and businesses now have high-speed Internet service. The sports field has seen the number of softball diamonds reduced to make room for a



Chauvin, Alberta – Debbie Hagman

running track and soccer pitches to reflect current interests. Rather than replacing the circular concession stand, which citizens valued as part of their history, they decided to renovate it. And Susie, the World's Largest Softball, still welcomes visitors and serves as a reminder of events past. Meanwhile, Chauvin has been experimenting with new activities, such as a Middle-of-Nowhere youth convention, that look to a future role for Chauvin in the larger community.

Creating a sustainable future is an ongoing process requiring evaluation and adaptation to changing conditions, technology and resource availability. In smaller communities like Chauvin, this includes finding innovative ways to fund projects. The citizens' advisory group also identified setting realistic goals and not trying to take on too much too quickly as critical, given that most of the work is done by volunteers. Village leaders recognized that although some goals are beyond the reach of one village, they might be achievable by communities in a region working together. To that end, Chauvin has teamed with nearby Irma and Edgerton to form the ICE alliance, which will pursue joint projects such as facilities for elders.

As Chauvin engaged in the MSP process, participants came to understand and appreciate that a deeper understanding of the concept and practice of sustainability could assist in addressing a broad range of community goals. They increasingly see themselves as part of a larger community

that they can both share with and gain knowledge from. Because of this willingness to look at the bigger picture and involve

They came to understand and appreciate that a deeper understanding of the concept and practice of sustainability could assist in addressing a broad range of community goals.

their citizens in strategic planning and decision-making, they developed a commitment and a momentum towards a more sustainable future.

This article is based on "Municipal Sustainability Planning, Community Engagement, and Rural Revitalization: A Case Study of Chauvin, Alberta," by Moira Calder, Mary Beckie and Shelly McMann, a chapter in the forthcoming book Taking the Next Steps: Sustainability Planning, Participating and Public Policy in Rural Canada, Lars Halstrom, Mary Beckie, Glen Havigaard and Karsten Mundel, editors; University of Alberta Press. Moira Calder, MA Communications and Technology, works for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Mary Beckie, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta.

Overcoming the Peaks and Valleys of Resource-Dependent Economies: The Frontier History

Jim Sellers

The histories of Hinton and Grande Cache, located on the western slopes of the Canadian Rockies in west-central Alberta, are rooted primarily in their importance as transportation routes for aboriginal tribes, trappers and travellers. The name Grande Cache comes from an Iroquois fur trapper, Ignace Gausson, who, in the early 19th century, established a large fur cache in the area. Hinton was named for William D. Hinton, general manager of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway at the beginning of the 20th century. With the coming of the railroad, settlement and industry, these communities became increasingly important for their resources: furs, timber, coal, oil and gas. Over time, Hinton and Grande Cache became dominated by the resource industries that provided the majority of employment. As a result, quality of life in the region has often been affected economically and socially by the economic peaks and dips controlled by market forces far beyond their boundaries. The communities have had to bend to the needs of industry, not the other way around.

While resource industries were the primary draw for immigration to the area, many other people came for the remote location, the proximity to nature and the distance from urban centres further east. Today, these towns boast many lifestyle advantages over urban centres because of their proximity to natural and forested areas, including

Jasper National Park, many world-class recreational sites and the scenic Athabasca River. In addition, many of the workers in the resource industries enjoy higher-than-average incomes: the median family income is \$82,069 compared with the Alberta average of \$73,823, while more than 26 per cent of the adults earn more than \$60,000 per year compared to the rest of Alberta at 18.7 per cent (source: 2005 Census of Canada).

Unique Rural Challenges

Hinton, 270 kilometres west of Edmonton, has about 9,700 residents and is a regional hub for the area and a major thoroughfare on the Yellowhead Highway. Grande Cache, with about 4,000 residents, is located 143 kilometres northwest of Hinton. They have seen substantial growth in the retail, business and service industries, including hotels, restaurants and major retailers such as Safeway and Wal-Mart. However, significant challenges are created by income disparity. Employees of resource industries generally earn higher incomes and enjoy good benefit programs, while workers in retail and service jobs generally make much less and have fewer benefits. Because the resource industries are the primary employers in both communities, Hinton and Grande Cache are subject to social stagnation as generations of families work within the same industries with little or no entrepreneurial growth. The lure of high wages associated with shift work often discourages citizens from seeking a

post-secondary education, which further limits economic diversification.

Both municipalities face typical rural issues such as long distances to urban centres, a lack of comprehensive educational programs and a shortage of medical specialists because of the limited population base. They also face many of the challenges that affect urban

Because the resource industries are the primary employers in both communities, Hinton and Grande Cache are subject to social stagnation as generations of families work within the same industries with little or no entrepreneurial growth.

centres, such as housing sprawl, increasing income and social segregation, infrastructure deficits and growing environmental stresses regarding landfills and recycling. Health issues caused by an aging population and increasing obesity rates are a growing concern, as are social issues such as drug use, alcohol abuse, gambling and online gaming reducing the activities of their youth.

To address these challenges and to promote the natural and rural advantages their communities offer to individuals and businesses, Hinton and Grande Cache have



Hinton, Alberta - Owen Laukkanen

decided to work together to investigate their objectives and options for social, economic and environmental sustainability. Unlike many resource-based communities that are forced to address these issues once an industry closes or moves away, these two communities are enjoying growth in their industry base as well as in their populations. They are choosing to address their future sustainability in part because of the projected growth in population and the greater demands it will bring.

The Collaboration

Hinton and Grande Cache have teamed up with researchers and faculty from Athabasca University (AU) and Grande Prairie Regional College specializing in the areas of business, social studies, education and community engagement to explore options and, ultimately, provide a road map for the two communities. The three-year, \$800,000 co-operative research project was launched in early 2010.

This unique mixture of post-secondary researchers, representatives of the local college and municipal leaders joining together to investigate and recommend best options for the future represents a new approach to the challenges of long-term sustainability faced by rural municipalities. Each partner in this collaborative project will bring a different knowledge base to the group, from practical experience in municipal issues and resource industries to theory in environmental and social issues. Many of the academics involved have experience with similar studies elsewhere around the world, while local representatives will provide a clear understanding of the needs and priorities of their communities.

One of those priorities is housing costs, which, pushed up by the larger incomes from the resource industry, make home ownership difficult for lower-income workers and new hires. The project will investigate alternative financing options to make houses more affordable and the communities more attractive to future residents.

Another challenge created by high shift-work wages is their effect in discouraging workers from taking entrepreneurial risks. Researchers will look at ways to promote and diversify entrepreneurial ventures, for example, by analyzing what imported products could be manufactured locally or alternative uses of local resources. They will also look at the plausibility of encouraging entrepreneurship and homeownership through local investment, which could provide a respectable return for investors and create more value in the communities.

The Process

As a crucial first step, the municipalities asked for community input on visions of a sustainable community. Grande Cache undertook this in 2006, and Hinton in 2009, through online polls and listening to citizens and business owners in homes, coffee shops, boardrooms and meeting halls. Community members contributed enthusiastically with needs, plans and suggestions. Among the ideas were better access to post-secondary education, more opportunities for recreational activities such as walking and biking, a greater number of venues to host arts performances and other events, and a move towards greater economic diversity. This feedback has provided both town councils with the focus and impetus

to move forward and investigate their best options for a more sustainable future.

The next step in the collaborative partnership was a conference in Hinton in May 2011 called *Setting the Stage*, which brought together key stakeholders to discuss the communities' needs and wishes. *Setting the Stage* provided the group with the information needed for researching the best options to move forward.

The Future

The plan looking forward includes creating a community resource package, hosting a followup conference expected in early 2012, researching further into specific options and alternatives for development and sustainability, and organizing a final action conference to present the results and recommendations from the research.

By investigating and comparing experiences in other resource-based communities, as well as doing in-depth research into options for addressing the needs and priorities of town residents, researchers will create a series of recommendations outlining potential outcomes and benefits. Through this collaboration, the group will create a road map toward long-term sustainability planning — one, it is hoped, that will ultimately be a template for other communities.

The municipalities of Hinton and Grande Cache and the research partners at Athabasca University and NorQuest College are working towards creating culturally and economically diversified communities that can balance the peaks and valleys of resource-based economies and provide friendly, safe and sustainable places to live and work.

Jim Sellers is a writer and project co-ordinator working with Athabasca University on the Hinton/Grande Cache Sustainability Project and other research projects relating to the Athabasca River Basin.

Grande Cache, Alberta - Fox Photog-



Wind Power, Locomotives and Community Leadership in Rural Alberta

Two success stories of economic transition

Brad Dollevoet and John R. Parkins

Nestled on the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies, Pincher Creek, in southwest Alberta, is a community of great beauty and opportunity: a place of rugged wilderness, resourceful people and a diversified economy based on agriculture, natural gas and mineral extraction. But in the early 1980s, the economic prospects for the town and the region did not look good.

Pincher Creek, 180 kilometres south of Calgary, was struggling with a decline in the local economy, given mine closures in the Crowsnest Pass region and a decline in the natural gas sector. Local residents, some with limited education, lost their jobs, and these changes caused a significant decline in local industries and local services.

While this story of decline is all too common in many rural communities across Western Canada, it is not the case in every community. A study conducted at the University of Alberta in April 2010 sought to understand more about the underlying conditions for successful economic transition in 10 rural communities. Insights and direct quotes in this article are taken from conversations with community leaders from two of these communities.

In response to economic decline, the Town of Pincher Creek embarked on a remarkable transformation. As one local leader recalls, “there was recognition that something more [could] be done to create community stability. It was the recognition that in 10 to 15 years, there would be a crisis.

The writing was on the wall.” With this recognition, that the crisis represented an opportunity as much as it did a threat, leaders in Pincher Creek started a slow but steady process of economic transformation that is now recognized as a rural development success story.

One of the first steps in the transition was to establish a regional voice for change. The southwest region of Alberta developed a group of communities to work together to promote tourism and to speak with a collective voice to higher levels of government. This became the Southwest Regional Alliance and was Alberta’s first Regional Economic Development Alliance (REDA). A former mayor of Pincher Creek noted that “the collective support of surrounding communities has made a big difference. The southwest platform speaks to a larger audience and it speaks as one voice.”

Another step along the way involved the development of a community re-visioning plan, with numerous town meetings, presentations and discussions, which helped create a collective sense of pride and community spirit about the future of Pincher Creek. At these meetings, local residents communicated that “agriculture is most important and we need to protect the ranching and farming community,” one study participant recalls. “But they also told us to harness the wind — if we have the opportunity to make some money from the wind, we should do it.”

This initial vision became an important starting point for the development of wind energy within the Pincher Creek area. At a time in Alberta history when almost all of government and industry attention was focused firmly on the development of hydrocarbons, Pincher Creek became a leader in wind energy development. The first wind turbine was built in 1994 with the support of a local entrepreneur. Ten years later, wind energy projects had injected more than \$10 million into the local economy, and a number of wind power corporate offices are now located in Pincher Creek. In 2007, there were 167 megawatts of installed capacity in the Municipal District of Pincher Creek, with the proposed output for all projects under consideration reaching 706.2 megawatts. This success in wind power development resulted in other local developments. The mayor of Pincher Creek at the time of the study offered some perspective on these developments: “We have people coming to cowboy poetry, home and garden shows, and the local rodeo. We’re moving forward to build strong partnerships with neighbouring communities. And we are very blessed with our relationship with surrounding First Nation communities.”

Laying Down Tracks Toward Local Control

The achievements in Pincher Creek are a welcome change from stories of economic



Battle River near Fabyan, Alberta – Jim Henry



Pincher Creek, Alberta - Ashley Bristowe

decline in many agricultural towns across the Prairies, but the community is not alone in forging new economic opportunities and local livelihoods. The Battle River Railway New Generation Co-op represents another interesting economic success story. It involves a change in ownership of critical transportation infrastructure — namely the purchase of a local rail line and grain-handling facilities.

Connecting the central Alberta communities of Kelsey, Rosalind, Heisler, Forestburg, Galahad and Alliance, the Battle River Railway represents a group of active farmers and investors and a collection of supportive communities that responded to declining transportation services in some very interesting ways. Shortly after meeting with CN in 2003 and hearing its tentative plans to abandon the rail line, a group of about 10 local farmers met to discuss their options. The group believed that CN would not abandon the line if the number of grain cars loaded could be increased. As noted by a local farmer and co-op organizer, “Producers had seen all their local services and infrastructure taken away, and the group decided that abandoning the railway was the last straw.”

The Battle River Railway began organizing to load cars with grain in order to increase local utilization of the rail infrastructure. In 2008, 650 cars were loaded, but these efforts weren't enough to stop the threat of CN closing the line. So the group began raising money to purchase the line from CN for \$3.5 million. Through the efforts of local farmers and the sale of shares in the New Generation Co-op, the goal was reached. By late 2010, the group had purchased the rail line, placing the local rail infrastructure fully under the control of local investors.

According to Dr. Darin Barney from McGill University, who has studied these events closely, “this is a remarkable story of producer interests, and understanding the important role that infrastructure plays in the agricultural community. The endeavour has also had spillover effects, in that, for example, it has taught them that some kind of collective action is possible, despite the economic constraints.” With these successes now in place, the next step for these farmers and communities is to capitalize on other ways of using the rail line. A leader for the New Generation Co-op sees opportunity in many areas: “There is potential to provide tourism services, as the line follows the Battle River and is a very scenic and historical ride. We hope to one day ship pulse crops, such as canola, in addition to grains.”

Although this story of economic success focuses on maintaining a critical infrastructure for agriculture, it is also linked directly to the survival of rural communities in the region. With the maintenance of local grain handling and transportation, people are more inclined to work and travel locally, purchase local goods and services, and support local communities.

At the Heart of Success

These two examples of economic transition in rural communities speak to the important link between local leadership, re-visioning and positive economic change. The real spark or catalyst within these communities involved creative people and innovative ideas; the ideas started small and then grew into the successes that are now recognized throughout Alberta and beyond.

A core theme in these two communities, and the eight others that were part of this study, has to do with local leadership and

community capacity-building. Concepts like political capacity, local buy-in, effective local institutions, learning to work together, regional co-operation and civic engagement are at the heart of all these success stories.

Leadership is often a scarce commodity, but these communities possess and reflect this rare asset in many ways. They illustrate that local leadership and capacity can change the dynamics of community behaviour

A core theme in these two communities, and the eight others that were part of this study, has to do with local leadership and community capacity-building.

from one of crisis and decline to one of opportunity and development. For this reason, it is almost impossible to overstate the value of community leadership and the need to invest in training and partnership development that can facilitate this kind of economic success in other communities and regions.

For a copy of the full version of this project report, please visit the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities website at www.augustana.ualberta.ca/centres/acsrc/.

Brad Dollevoet is director of planning and community development for the Town of Rocky Mountain House.

John R. Parkins is an associate professor in the Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology at the University of Alberta.

Arts and Culture: A Rural Perspective

Alison Baird



Rosebud, Alberta – Bernie Nemeth

We've all heard how beneficial arts and culture can be to cities that embrace them. We've all heard how music lessons can keep an inner city youth from joining a gang or how a mural can help deter graffiti on a city street. Sure, arts and culture have a place in large urban areas where museums, art galleries, theatres and music venues are plentiful, but what about towns, villages and counties?

Rural communities have fallen on hard times. With large urban centres presenting opportunity and convenience at every turn, rural communities are struggling to keep up. Rural populations are steadily declining and aging, making it difficult to retain youth who grew up in these communities and to attract new residents. According to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Alberta's rural and small town population declined by 4.5 per cent between 2001 and 2006.

Alberta's communities have tried a variety of ways to address these issues, but the potential of arts and culture has been largely ignored. Can arts and culture fix the problems facing today's rural communities? How can rural policy-makers use arts and culture to help sustain and develop their communities?

A Picture of Potential

It's a warm Sunday afternoon in Pipestone, Alberta, 73 kilometres south of Edmonton, between Highway 2 and Pigeon Lake. The local school is swarming with county residents, leaders and business owners. Surprisingly, parking is hard to find. It's not often that visitors to the school circle the parking lot, only to realize they'll need to park on the street.

But today is different. Today, local pastor Tim Wray and about 70 young residents have taken over the gym for a photography

exhibition. And the turnout is more than Wray, or anyone in the small rural community, expected.

Wray organized the PhotoVoice project with one main goal in mind: action. Younger citizens of Pipestone were generally absent from local decision-making organizations like the community association, the recreation commission and the church. Wray set out to change that. "PhotoVoice itself was invented as a way for a voiceless population to get a voice so that change could be made," he says, admitting that his goals were modest. "Locally, I hope there [will] be a policy change. It might not even make it into written policy, but it would become a practice."

During the 10-week project, young adults between 18 and 35 learned photography skills, shared photographs taken in the community and discussed the life of young

adults in rural Alberta. The culmination is the photo exhibit, attended by residents, local politicians, members of various organizations, employers and government agencies, which is aimed at creating awareness of issues and opportunities facing young people in rural communities.

A Role Unplayed

According to a 2009 report commissioned by the Creative City Network of Canada called *Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Culture*, arts and culture are largely absent from the rural landscape for a variety of reasons. One reason is the lack of access to information or programs, due largely to the geographical distance from arts and culture organizations. That isolation also makes inclusive Internet coverage hard to facilitate, further restricting residents' opportunities to educate themselves on arts and culture. Opportunities for learning about arts and culture and building new skills are in short supply, as are the opportunities for artists to perform or showcase their work. And when there is some sort of arts and culture festival or organization, it often lacks funding, volunteers, participants and performance opportunities.

These issues, added to the fact that rural communities are coping with more pressing challenges and limited funding, mean arts and culture are often put on the back burner. Yet these kinds of initiatives might actually offer a tool for fixing some of the problems. The report suggests that rural communities that embrace arts and culture have found such initiatives can help sustain and develop the community, create jobs, drive tourism and boost the local economy. They can also bring a sense of purpose and belonging to citizens, a morale boost, and create a reason for youth to stay in a rural setting by increasing economic and social opportunities.

Getting arts and culture to work for a rural community requires leaders and policy-makers

to put the needs of the community before growth and development. According to the report, community buy-in is essential, and integration, engaged youth and leadership development should be encouraged. There should also be increased funding support that is community-driven, sustainable, controlled from the bottom up and, when desired, supported by government. Rural policy-makers need to have a strong sense of what is best for residents, businesses and the community's future growth.

When Arts and Culture Meet Tourism

So what can happen when rural communities embrace arts and culture? Well, one possibility is that they become destinations for tourists and artists alike — become, in a sense, a haven for artists. With tourism as the third most important economic driver in the province, that's nothing to scoff at. The Canadian Badlands Ltd. (CBL) is a not-for-profit corporation that encourages tourists to visit southeast Alberta, areas like Drumheller, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. Alberta's badlands might be better known for dinosaur bones and hoodoos, but the area is slowly developing a niche as an arts community.

CBL makes it clear that artists and performers, as well as those who admire arts and culture, will get their fair share of it in the area. On top of the Heart of Art festival in Brooks, the photography tours throughout the Drumheller area and the historical Rosebud Theatre in Rosebud, there is the Hive in Medicine Hat; the arts collective in the city's downtown is becoming known as the "arts district," bringing people to the stores, restaurants and community events. "We've been certainly trying to facilitate and move arts and culture along, because we recognize it is a viable tourism entity," says Jody Lamb of CBL. "There are people who simply vacation for arts and culture."

Crafting a Strong Community

Other arts and culture initiatives are creating a sense of community. Take Creative Campus in the Hinton area, east of Jasper National Park. What began as a local piano festival has turned into a multi-city arts and culture festival that brings in 1,000 people each year and facilitates arts and culture learning throughout the year. The initiative brings art into the lives of citizens in Hinton, Jasper, Grande Cache and Edson.

"Everyone wants to have that one thing that makes them feel alive, feel happy and feel a part of something," says Melissa

The report suggests that rural communities that embrace arts and culture have found such initiatives can help sustain and develop the community, create jobs, drive tourism and boost the local economy.

Pattison, business manager for Creative Campus. "For many, arts and culture can be a great source of these feelings."

Snapshot of Potential

Back in Pipestone, Wray and his team of amateur photographers share the voice of the community's rural youth through 10 weeks' worth of photography.

As Wray surveys the crowd at the exhibit and plays host to the swelling audience, he's excited about the possibilities. Maybe these young people will gain the confidence to organize more arts-related events. Maybe the county will see the positive impact arts can have and invest funds. Whatever the case, Wray can already sense the potential.

The value of arts or cultural events in rural areas is often underestimated or undervalued, but the impacts can be far-reaching. By recognizing this potential in Alberta's rural communities, residents and decision-makers will have another tool for sustaining and growing the places they call home.

Alison Baird, a recent graduate of the professional writing program at Grant MacEwan University, worked as a summer website and communications assistant at the Alberta Rural Development Network.

Hinton, Alberta – Christina Johns-Oliver





Soggy Southeast Saskatchewan During the Summer of 2011

Barret Weber

Southeastern Saskatchewan in the areas around Estevan, Lampman, Portal and Weyburn experienced devastating floods this year lasting well into the summer months. Minot, North Dakota, 90 kilometres south of the Saskatchewan and Manitoba borders, fared even worse, as water in the surrounding flood plain reached as high as three metres, often in places where houses and facilities were built during the past 20 years of dry environmental conditions. The Minot flood was caused when the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority released water in mid-June from the Boundary and Rafferty dams in an effort to relieve pressure on the dams and avert a much worse disaster. As this suggests — and as is usually the case with water management — the scope of the problem is truly regional.

Record levels of snowfall, precipitation and runoff over the past two years transformed this usually dry transboundary region into a series of massive lakes, rivers and creeks. In short, it's a mess, and few know what to do about it. The Souris River, little more than a dried-up river in the 1980s, overflowed its banks this summer and has brought about countless dollars' worth of property damage. Many people will have to start over, as everything they own was under water. The flooding reached proportions beyond the wildest of imaginations. The region had not seen flooding this severe

since the flood of 1969 in Minot, known as one of the most cruel calamities in that city's history, spanning back to the late 19th century. Some estimates now show that 2011 was even worse.

In southeastern Saskatchewan, very few crops were planted in this largely agricultural region. Most farm equipment did not move since the winter, except to be relocated to higher ground to escape the floods. "Volunteer" canola (meaning it wasn't planted this year) sprang up everywhere in fields, leaving what dry areas remained with a distinctive yellow hue. During the summer, opinions differed as to whether it would be worth harvesting the volunteer canola in the fall and if combines could get into the fields at all. By the fall, opinions still differed as to whether it was worth harvesting the lacklustre crops at all.

Many farmers in the region also work in the oilfield to offset the prohibitive costs of farming. But this year, there was little relief to be found even there. Some oilfield workers in the booming Bakken Oil Formation sat idle throughout most of the summer because they were unable to reach the leases and rigs, and some have left the region altogether to find work elsewhere. For these and other reasons, the region now faces a severe shortage of skilled oilfield labour.

It is an understatement to say that the extremely high moisture levels have put an

end to any sense of normalcy in the region, and this is widely expected to carry on into the future. There is nowhere for the water to run, and the water table is at its highest level ever recorded.

No one can agree on the causes of this historic disaster, but few remain in denial that the environment is changing quickly and that next year promises to be no better.

It is an understatement to say that the extremely high moisture levels have put an end to any sense of normalcy in the region, and this is widely expected to carry on into the future. There is nowhere for the water to run, and the water table is at its highest level ever recorded.

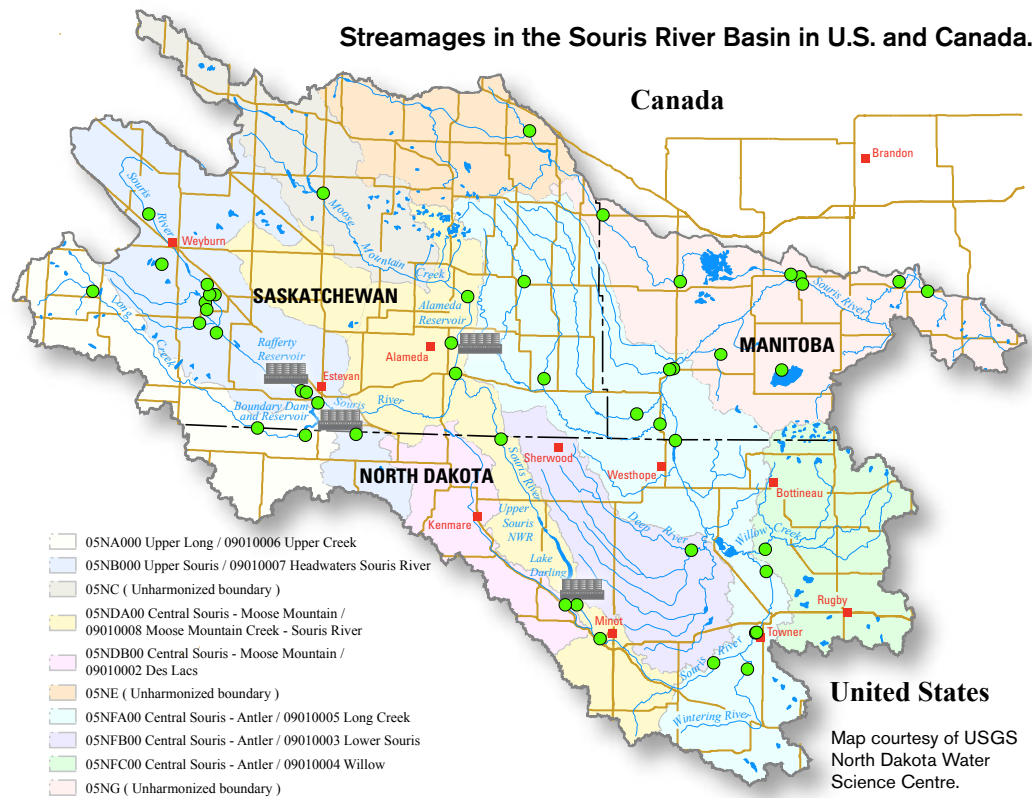
Various theories and rumours circulate as to the cause, ranging from the regional flow of water through culverts, to the much larger questions of climate change and the effects of large-scale damming in the region.

During the crisis, however, it was too early for the big regional questions — residents were naturally focused on the more immediate



Southeast Saskatchewan – Barret Weber

Streamages in the Souris River Basin in U.S. and Canada.



concerns of protecting their property and communities. I was in Saskatchewan from June 24 to July 1 helping on my parents’ farm and in the nearby community of Benson at the height of its crisis. Before I arrived, it had rained something like 22 centimetres (nine inches) in two days. The ground was already saturated after months of record rain and snowfall, and there was nowhere for the water to go but into the towns of Benson and Lampman and over large stretches of farmland and oilfield-related leases.

As a result, residents of Benson were filling and laying sandbags or having them shipped in from the nearby town of Lampman, at the time a new centre of sandbag production. Benson was building barricades of sandbags, dirt and large hay bales throughout the community to either slow down or divert the flow of water. More than 50 large oilfield pump trucks were contracted for several days — subject to much community debate — to pump water out of a ditch and over Highway 47 east of Benson.

As is not uncommon in such situations, tempers flared up at times over basic operational issues, such as what needed to be done by whom in the short term, where best to place the sandbags and which buildings were “worth saving.” A serious disagreement emerged, discussed often while we were sandbagging, when word circulated that authorities with the Rural Municipality

(RM) of Benson were not adequately protecting the Sacred Heart Church or the community hall, not to mention surrounding farms that were left to fend for themselves. A last-minute decision was made by the RM to save only inhabited houses in Benson (except one, which was subsequently seriously damaged by the floods) — which testifies to the serious decisions that had to be made in the heat of the moment. A day after the rains had stopped, self-organizing community members brought in a local contractor to put a proper barrier of sandbags around both the church and the community hall. So, as officials with the RM scrambled to save the community, they also struggled to somehow stay agile in the midst of severe criticism from the most unusual of sources in these tightly knit rural communities — their friends.

The flooding in southeast Saskatchewan has not only been hard on the people, it

has also drastically changed the politics of the area. Some serious regional decisions will need to be made for the long-term sustainability of those that live and work in southeast Saskatchewan, North Dakota and Manitoba. The transboundary nature of the region will make these negotiations difficult, as various provincial, state and national interests are at stake. To date, these governments in Canada and the U.S. have provided relief funds for those affected by the floods. In the longer term, proactive decisions will have to be made on how best to manage these issues in responsive ways, as high precipitation anticipated over the next year threatens to bring back more of the same in 2012.

Barret Weber is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Alberta. He teaches and writes on politics and globalization in Canada and beyond.

Southeast Saskatchewan – Barret Weber



Rural Caregivers: Supporting the Support

Carlene Van Brabant

How does one define the term health-care worker? The notion of nurses and doctors readily comes to mind. Thoughts of ambulance workers and administrative personnel probably filter in later. We hardly think of the neighbour, friend or family member who may spend significant time supporting the health needs of someone close to them. These individuals play a critical and often forgotten role in Alberta's and Canada's health-care system. If these remarkable people were to suddenly stop contributing to our society, the Canadian health-care system would lose the equivalent of close to \$5 billion in services. It is estimated that caregivers across Canada provide more than 80 per cent of health care for those with long-term needs.

The Alberta Caregiver Association (ACGA) gives support, education and a voice to those who provide unpaid services by caring for family or friends, whether they are in rural or urban areas. The association works with those organizations already in a community and supplements their programming with additional resources. Ideally, the local organization has developed a base within the community, and ACGA will add more programming while the community organization supplies the venue and the promotion for the programs. ACGA can either deliver the program directly or provide resources to train the partnering organization's staff. Partnering in this way improves the array of services found for the caregiver.

While caregivers in urban areas often need assistance in sorting through the array of services available, ACGA is finding the opposite is true in rural areas, where there are few or no services for caregivers. The association sees a pressing need for a strategic provincewide plan that will address both urban and rural needs, and is working toward this by highlighting the need for unique rural programs. It partnered with the Alberta Rural Development Network to understand the needs of rural caregivers across the province. In order to gain more insight, the two organizations hosted several one-day workshops in October 2010 consisting of open discussions on caregivers' needs and what would best support them.

During the workshops, it became clear that

the rural population has unique issues and concerns and must have a way to express these needs. With the findings of the workshops now formalized in a report called *Yours, Mine and Ours* (available at www.albertacaregiversassociation.org/convention2010.html), ACGA is working on developing the best methods to implement strategies across the province to support caregivers in rural areas.

Rural Needs Differ

When it comes to rural caregivers' needs, "equitable" may not mean having the same services as urban areas. At the most basic level, rural concerns often differ from urban. For example, the culture that surrounds the rural way of life has a deep connection to community and a pride in self-reliance; this has a significant impact on how caregiver needs are addressed.

One major issue for rural caregivers is a lack of access to services, which can take several different forms. The most literal is having little or no services offered in a small community. Another is the need to drive significant distances to utilize services. Given the travel required for the care of the patient, a caregiver may not drive the additional distances in order to support his or her own needs. A high turnover of health-care service providers is another problem, since not having a consistent professional to turn to can impose additional work and worry on the caregivers. The outcome is that the quality of care is reduced for the patient.

Isolation in and of itself is also an issue for caregivers. Not only does isolation reduce a caregiver's access to health-care support in the local vicinity, it also leaves little opportunity for contact with other caregivers with similar experiences — the reason ACGA was created in the first place. Being networked with others who can offer advice or understanding on the caregiver experience can help a person cope and gain perspective.

Another key issue with rural caregivers is to acknowledge to themselves that caregivers play a unique and specific role. When seeking out ACGA services, caregivers generally want to share the patients' care and progress rather than speak to their own needs. ACGA

attributes this to the culture of self-sufficiency in rural communities, where people are accustomed to working through their issues on their own. This can create tremendous stress, which can lower immunity and ultimately affect a caregiver's physical and mental health. Rural caregivers often need to shift their perspective to ensure they take care of themselves properly, as it is vital in the continuing care of their loved ones.

A Provincial Strategy

The Alberta Caregiver Association is working to create needed support systems for its members through a provincial strategy. Among the ideas is to create opportunities for members to connect and share their wisdom with each other, which is recognized as having major potential to ease the burden of caregivers. This networking could be through attending a convention to gain more information or by bringing caregivers together locally for peer support. Another strategy is to build caregiving resources and increased caregiving capacity in rural areas. Such approaches will help create consistent and equitable service delivery for all Albertans.

Another interesting idea is to create a position of a rural patient navigator. This person would serve a community or region as a point person for all health-related services. While there may still be turnover of medical professionals and support services in rural areas, this individual can create a consistent source of information.

ACGA also recognizes another unaddressed issue: the tremendous financial strain imposed on caregivers. Suggestions from the workshop include using travel vouchers or providing transportation and accommodation for appointments in addition to the traditional tax breaks — these are new areas that could ease the financial commitments of caregivers.

Caregivers need to be seen as an integral part of the health-care team. Together ACGA and the province can create an Alberta where caregivers are valued and supported.

Carlene Van Brabant writes about agriculture and is the owner of Verdue Media and Communications.



Transforming Research into Action

Have you ever wondered how to help your community grow? Have you ever read a research report that promised to give you the tools to move forward but only left you confused and disheartened? Have you ever wished that you could spend less time deciphering and more time acting?

If you have, the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) can help. As a not-for-profit, the Network works with its members (colleges, universities, and technical institutes) to enhance the vibrancy of Alberta's rural communities.

ARDN introduces researchers to the benefits and possibilities that stem from partnering *with* communities instead of conducting research on communities.

A few months ago, a researcher came to ARDN requesting assistance for a project on environmental issues facing Alberta's rural communities. Staff at ARDN determined that the communities didn't appear to fully understand the purpose and scope of the project, or the benefits it could bring to them. So, ARDN facilitated a networking event that brought together the community members and the researcher to discuss the project and ensure that the communities were engaged in the entire process, **not as research subjects, but as partners**. Now, not only has the researcher ensured the cooperation and support of the partners, but the communities will gain practical information, helping them overcome environmental challenges.

In addition to facilitating better partnerships, ARDN also requires that researchers share the results with communities – not as research papers with scientific jargon and undefined next steps, **but as plain language reports detailing specific and actionable conclusions**, steps that communities can use to move forward.

In Fall 2010, ARDN caught a glimpse of the possibilities these results can create when a pair of researchers worked with two communities to identify the challenges around creating and maintaining businesses in the area.

With ARDN's help they engaged the towns in nearly every step of the process, conducting a survey and holding workshops. After the research was compiled, the researchers went back to the communities to share their results, such as the need for joint marketing initiatives, revitalization of the local Chamber of Commerce, and increased involvement of local agencies and organizations, all of which can be used to **propel the communities forward**.

Less than a year later, the towns have already started to implement the ideas. They are holding workshops on website development and facilitating local training to enhance planning, marketing, IT knowledge, and the financial skills of local business owners. As a direct result of the study, new businesses are springing to life. **And everyone is more willing to work together**. Seeing the two communities progress by leaps and bounds has driven the researchers to begin working with other ARDN members to turn the small research study into one that will cover over 20 other rural communities throughout Alberta.

ARDN knows the value of research increases when rural communities and researchers collaborate to create great projects.

Knowledge shouldn't sit unused on a shelf; it should form the foundation on which communities can grow and thrive.

The Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) is a not-for-profit partnership of Alberta's 21 public colleges, universities, and technical institutes working together to support rural communities. ARDN is funded in part by Rural Alberta Development Fund whose funding is provided by the Alberta Government. For more information on ARDN please call 1-877-987-1006 or visit www.ardn.ca.

Financial support
provided in part by
Rural Alberta
Development Fund
www.radf.ca

**Alberta
Rural
Development
Network**

Curb Magazine is a university-community initiative made possible by the support of our generous sponsors:



Submit an Article or Photo

Curb Magazine is about policy practice and community experiences in cities, regions and rural areas. Curb is distributed to municipal offices and planning departments across western Canadian provinces and territories, and Northwestern United States.

We welcome articles that examine and challenge ideas such as governance infrastructure, design, public spaces and sustainability. We also welcome articles on the themes of our upcoming issues:

1. **Innovation and community development**
2. **Suburban retail and public facilities**

For more information visit CurbMagazine.ca



Photo Contest Winner

Congratulations to Jim Henry, winner of the Rural Communities photo contest.

This photo was taken east of Wasel, Alberta just north of the North Saskatchewan River in Smoky Lake County. The house was built in 1915.

