

## ***Keynote speakers only one way to engage participants at Alberta Rural Development Network conference scheduled for Edmonton April 12-14***

SHERWOOD PARK, *March 10, 2011* - Albertans who care about rural development won't want to miss the *Creating Rural Connections 2011* conference in Edmonton April 12 to 14. Organized by the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN), the conference features over 30 top-notch speakers, including three keynote presenters, who will share their research and experience with community leaders, post-secondary researchers, and others.

"Our keynote speakers will address projects and perspectives from outside Alberta while our session speakers will focus on what's happening here," said Dee Ann Benard, ARDN executive director. "Though there will be lots to listen to and learn from, the conference is also intended to be a place to meet others, exchange information and ideas, and explore potential partnerships."

Mike Stolte, executive director of the Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership, will deliver the keynote address at the April 12 evening reception that opens the conference. His presentation "How Vital is Your Community?" is based on his book *Beyond Economic Survival: 97 Ways Small Communities Can Thrive – A Guide to Community Vitality*.

Charlie French, an associate professor at the University of New Hampshire, specializes in public engagement and community development and will give the opening plenary on April 13. His focus is on how to bring the university to the community, a concept central to ARDN's mandate. Concurrent sessions on a wide array of topics will follow throughout the day. An evening banquet features entertainment by That Funny Magic Guy.

Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the Honourable Greg Weadick, will open the last day of the conference on April 14. Following a full morning of sessions, Jeff Dixon, assistant director at Queen's University's Monieson Centre, will be the luncheon speaker. His presentation on the Rural Research Priorities project in Ontario will be a foundation for ARDN's Rural Research Needs and Priorities Assessment Workshop that afternoon. In this workshop, participants will identify their rural communities' research needs. ARDN will use that information to launch new projects to address those needs.

For information or to register, visit [www.ardn.ca](http://www.ardn.ca) or call 1-877-987-1006. Early bird registration ends March 15.

*ARDN is a partnership of Alberta's 21 publicly-funded, publicly-governed post-secondary institutions formed to support and enhance rural development through research, education, networking and collaboration. ARDN is funded in part by Rural Alberta Development Fund.*

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## *ARDN Conference: Keynote Topics and Speakers*

### **How Vital is Your Community?**

**7:00 p.m., Tuesday, April 12**

Is your community thriving or merely surviving? The Happy Economist Mike Stolte will focus on ways to gauge and improve your community's health by introducing participants to new concepts and practical tools such as the Community Vitality Initiative and the Communities Matrix.

**Mike Stolte** is executive director of the Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL), and the originator of many tools and processes to assess and strengthen communities. An internationally known facilitator, author and presenter, Stolte focuses on the need and methods for creating entrepreneurial, vital and sustainable communities. He is past president of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation and serves on the advisory committee of the Canadian Rural Research Network. He holds degrees from Carleton University (MA in Public Administration) and the University of Western Ontario (Economics).

### **Bringing the University to the Community**

**8:45 a.m., Wednesday, April 13, 2011**

**Charles French** is an associate professor of community development with the University of New Hampshire who will address how post-secondary research can help strengthen communities. French's focus is public engagement in local decision-making including land use, economic development, watershed planning and civic agriculture. His aim is to ensure that the needs and input of decision makers and the public are included in scientific inquiry. Dixon has a PhD in Natural Resources Policy and is a board member with Sustainable Harvest International.

### **Identifying Rural Research Priorities**

**12:30 p.m., Thursday, April 14**

Research has the potential to transform communities, create knowledge, and contribute to timely solutions and policy options to address issues. However, most rural communities have limited capacity to conduct research. This presentation will demonstrate how a collaboration of rural communities, government and post-secondary institutions worked together to conduct community consultations and inventory rural economic development research needs in Ontario.

**Jeff Dixon** is assistant director of The Monieson Centre at Queen's University, which connects leading research with real-world business and community needs. He was a team member on the Rural Research Priorities project, a collaboration of Queen's, the University of Guelph and the Ontario Rural Council that is the subject of his address. He is coordinating the Centre's Knowledge Impact in Society project in eastern Ontario, which includes the region's Francophone communities. Dixon is an honours graduate of Queen's Bachelor of Commerce program; he worked in a number of marketing and communications roles before returning to Queen's in his present position.