

33rd Annual Rural Community and Economic Development Conference *Repositioning Rural for Economies of the Future*

*Dedicated to the memory of Donald R. Norton, Sr., first
director of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council.*

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

8:15 a.m. *Zoom Platform Opens*

8:30-10:00 a.m. (Plenary) *Opening Session: Overcoming Challenges Facing Rural Illinois*
ZOOM LINK:
<https://illinois.zoom.us/j/84643483418?pwd=ajdyV29mQlZZMFAwQzAxVHJUCzc0dz09>

Moderator: Chris Merrett, Director, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

“Welcoming Remarks”

Guiyou Huang, President, Western Illinois University

“Revitalizing Rural Illinois: Many Challenges Ahead”

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, Governor's Rural Affairs Council

“The Illinois Agenda for Continued Rural Revitalization”

Andy Manar, Deputy Governor, State of Illinois

“Changing the Rural Narrative”

Neil Linscheid, University of Minnesota

Small towns keep getting smaller while churches, schools, clinics, businesses, and post offices have closed their doors as the lucky few migrate to the big cities. This deficit framework dominates how we discuss and envision our rural communities. This presentation will describe the broad trends and focus on communities' efforts to recruit and welcome new community residents. Learn how important positive changes have been happening across the rural landscape that requires us to rewrite the narrative of rural community change.

10:00 to 10:15 a.m. *Break*

10:15 to 12 noon (Plenary) *Capturing Potential Opportunities for Rural*

Moderator: Norman Walzer, Professor Emeritus, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

“Opening Remarks”

Betsy Londrigan, Illinois State USDA Director



10:15 to 12 noon (Plenary) *Capturing Potential Opportunities for Rural* (continued)

“Main Street Businesses as Part of Rural Revival: Policy Implications”

Ernie Goss, Creighton University

This study examines the nation’s 1,885 counties sorting them into counties that are connected and isolated. Connected counties are defined as those contiguous to urban counties, while isolated rural counties are defined as counties that share no borders with urban counties. The analysis concluded that the lack of the availability of a traditional hospital and linked Mainstreet businesses had a statistically significant and negative impact on the economies of isolated rural counties. Furthermore, the differential impact between connected and isolated rural counties has expanded over the past five years.

“Collaborative Rural Development and Regional Economic Connectivity”

Brian Dabson, Rural Policy Analysis and Research

This session points to positive signs that regional collaboration can be both an effective means of addressing rural and urban challenges and a vital part of the evolution of rural community and economic development. Highlights include examples from across the country that provide the rationale for thinking about rural development in a regional context.

“Rural Partners Update”

Laura Hepp Kessel, Chair, Rural Partners Board

Noon to 1:00 p.m. *Break*

12:30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. *Rural Partners Meeting*

Please contact Laura Hepp Kessel, Rural Partners Chair, at lkessel21@siu.edu if you would like to join this meeting or for more information about Rural Partners.

1 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Finding Strategies That Work*

ZOOM LINK:

<https://illinois.zoom.us/j/87432037773?pwd=ZFdHa1A4WUo0dGNtZzhOSXYyeWkzOT09>

**“2021 Annual Report of the Governors Rural Affairs Council:
Implementing the Recommendations of the GRAC”**

Bobby Mannis, Office of Lt. Governor Julia Stratton

Chris Merrett, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Western Illinois University

The Governors Rural Affairs Council (GRAC), chaired by Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, has a state mandate to develop and implement strategies to improve the delivery of state services to rural Illinois. The GRAC must also seek ways to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of

1 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Finding Strategies That Work* (continued)

life for rural residents. Finally, each year, the GRAC, in partnership with the Office of the Lt Governor and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, must compile and submit a report to the Illinois General Assembly on the status of economic conditions in rural Illinois. The report should also discuss ways to improve the quality of life in rural Illinois. With this context in mind, this presentation has two goals. First, it provides an overview of the 2021 Annual GRAC report, emphasizing the history of the GRAC and its mission, as well as providing a snap shot of rural Illinois demographics. Second, this presentation will summarize the work and recommendations of the three GRAC working groups: Workforce Development and Education, Healthcare Access and Broadband Delivery, and Economic Development and Infrastructure.

“Changing Roles of Main Streets in a New Era”

Ernie Goss, Creighton University

This study examines impact of farm income on the economic viability of Mainstreet businesses in the nation’s 1,885 counties between 2000 and 2020. Over the past two decades, exports as a share of farm income have expanded from 25.8% in 2000 to 37.6% in 2020. This study examines how this rising dependence on exports has increased income volatility of Mainstreet businesses and farms in rural U.S. counties.

“Partners for Rural America: Keeping a National Focus on Rural”

(Panel Discussion)

Jessica AcMoody, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan

Kimber Lanning, Local First Arizona

Bill Menner, Partners for Rural America

Blanche Shoup, Western Illinois Works

This session discusses the future of rural America and its dependent upon small towns with the capacity to create a vision for themselves. Capacity building is critical to that, and partners - local, regional, statewide and national – are working together to provide rural leaders with the resources they need.

“Leveraging the Power of Local Communities: The Illinois Connected Communities Program”

Robbie McBeath, Benton Institute for Broadband and Society

How can rural communities harness the economic power of broadband and increase digital equity in their communities? The Illinois Connected Communities grant program was developed to empower local communities to address digital divides through education, financial assistance, planning, and capacity-building. In this session, McBeath discusses his experience co-leading the program, including lessons learned and paths rural communities can take to increase broadband access, adoption, and use in their areas.

1 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Finding Strategies That Work* (continued)

“Regional Collaboration for Effective Rural Development “

Brian Dabson, Rural Policy Analysis and Research

Dabson builds on his plenary presentation by exploring lessons drawn from examples of regional collaboration in the Pacific Northwest, California, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Virginia, and showing how they reinforce emerging good practices for rural economic development. As time allows, participants will be encouraged to share their own experiences and perspectives.

“Digging Deeper into Rural Recruitment & Welcoming Strategies”

Neil Linscheid, University of Minnesota

This breakout session focuses on case studies of communities working to recruit, welcome, and retain new residents. It will highlight examples from Minnesota communities and provide advice on applying those lessons elsewhere describing practical tools and community processes that have been helpful to community leaders as they navigate this challenging work.

2:00 to 2:15 p.m. *Break*

2:15 to 3:15 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Success Stories with Outcomes*

“How to Make the Most of Your Economic Development Initiatives Using Data & Insights”

Matt Scachette, CIVICServ

Jon Oliphant, City of Washington

This session discusses how technology advances in the ED world are changing ...for the better. Ever changing State reporting requirements, an increasing demand for transparency, and a new kind of due diligence research on merit-based programs is the new normal. Data, insights, and technology adoption can empower smaller ED organizations with the tools and advantages larger communities have enjoyed for over a decade. Let’s talk about the future of rural local ED!

“Building an Entrepreneurial Infrastructure in Rural Communities”

Dara Macan, SOURCELINK, University of Missouri - Kansas City

What could we do if even a fraction of our available workforce could be inspired to create their own job? This concept of scaling entrepreneurship can be a part of the solution for rural communities looking to grow. New businesses create the majority of all net new jobs in the United States, according to research by the Kauffman Foundation. In this session, hear how rural developers are approaching entrepreneurship-led economic development for lasting impact.

2:15 to 3:15 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Success Stories with Outcomes* (continued)

“Grow Gillespie – Starting with a Plan!”

Zack Kennedy, University of Illinois Extension
Dan Fisher, Grow Gillespie
Gabe Guevara, Tri-County Regional Planning

The City of Gillespie worked with University of Illinois Extension to create an action plan to work toward the vision of Grow Gillespie. The vision includes capital improvements, economic development, and community arts. Grow Gillespie is a grassroots group of local residents, city officials, and local business owners. This session will primarily cover the economic and community development initiatives and outcomes that have occurred and are ongoing in Gillespie.

“Land Banks and Land Banking in Rural Communities”

Brent O. Denzin, Denzin Law

Rural communities confront vacant property challenges similar to their urban peers. Land and property that are obsolete, contaminated, tax delinquent or functionally abandoned may have liens and tax issues that make it difficult to proceed. Communities may lack the capacity to tackle redevelopment projects, let alone complicated ones. IL communities are using land Banks to get control over problem properties and put them to productive reuse. Learn how IHDA is helping establish land banks and the potential and pitfalls for land banks in rural IL communities.

“Illinois Humanities: Statewide Partnership Opportunities 2022”

Gabrielle Lyon, Illinois Humanities Council
Matt Meacham, Illinois Humanities Council

At Illinois Humanities, partnering with local entities is our lifeblood – particularly during the pandemic. Often, these partnerships are led by the question “What is the role of culture in community-building?” In this session, representatives will discuss what we're learning about the public humanities ecosystem and the role that organizations have been playing in strengthening their communities, as well as multiple opportunities for partnering with Illinois Humanities over the coming months and beyond, including upcoming grant opportunities, museum partnerships, a speaker's bureau, youth initiatives, and more.

“Engaging Teachers in Local Community Development Efforts“

Tammy La Prad, Monmouth College
Cammy Davis, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs Peace Corps Fellow

Through their commitment to “Revitalizing Rural Together”, Monmouth College’s Rural Education Initiatives (REDI) strengthen local relationships, foster collaboration, and accelerate community-driven action. These initiatives recognize that schools are central to community and economic development in rural areas. The session will provide examples of current

2:15 to 3:15 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Success Stories with Outcomes* (continued)

community development efforts undertaken in partnership with rural school districts, in west central Illinois, and will discuss how the approach may be applied elsewhere.

3:15 to 3:30 p.m. *Break*

3:30 to 4:30 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Innovative Practices*

“Funding Opportunities in a New Economy” (Panel Discussion)

Galen Gondolfi, Justine PETERSEN
Jonathan McGee, Illinois Department of Commerce
Mary Warren, USDA Rural Development
Michael Wallace, USDA Rural Development

The Panel consists of four presenters from key community economic development agencies and organizations operating at the Not-for-Profit, State, and Federal levels. Information will be provided on a wide variety of resources ranging from micro-lending, grants, loans, and other financing mechanisms. Panelists will address topics such as credit-building, infrastructure, economic and community building, and various housing development tools.

“The Increasingly Important Role of Telehealth in Rural Communities”

(Panel Discussion)

Scott Boston, Jacksonville Memorial Hospital
Brad Futrell, Pinckneyville Community Hospital
Mark S. Gridley, FHN Memorial Hospital

How are rural hospitals in Illinois utilizing telehealth to expand access to care for their communities? This moderated panel discussion will focus on the growth of telehealth in rural communities especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hospital leaders will share their experiences utilizing telehealth prior to and during the pandemic as well as how they plan to continue to use telehealth in the future.

“Putting Local Leadership into Action: Dieterich”

Brittney Gipson, Village of Dieterich
Alex Wright, Dieterich MAPPING Committee

Dieterich, Illinois participated in IIRA's MAPPING the Future of Your Community program in 1992, making it one of the first communities to participate in the community-driven strategic visioning and planning program. Since then, Dieterich community members have participated in four additional MAPPING update programs, experiencing significant success including the development of a rural water cooperative, two industrial parks, housing subdivisions, and a community foundation. As a result of their most recent MAPPING update in 2019, they have raised over \$3 million towards a new community center.

3:30 to 4:30 p.m. (Concurrent Sessions) *Innovative Practices* (continued)

“Land Banking in Illinois: Options for Rural Communities” (Panel Discussion)

Michael Davis, Central Illinois Land Bank Authority

Emily Doerr, Michigan State Fast Track Land Bank Authority

Brent O. Denzin, Denzin Law

Rural communities confront vacant property that is obsolete, contaminated, tax delinquent or functionally abandoned. Rural communities may lack the capacity to tackle redevelopment projects involving distressed real estate. In some states, regional or state-wide land banks are helping local communities address vacant property challenges. We will look at three options for rural communities in Illinois, including establishing a local or regional land bank as is the practice in Illinois, or establishing a statewide land bank that supports rural communities, as they are doing in Michigan.

“Assessing and Overcoming Environmental Issues in Rural Communities with CURES”

Tom Skuzinski, Northern Illinois University

Carolee Rigsbee, University of Illinois – Springfield

In this session, we review two significant outreach efforts to small, more rural communities in Illinois by the DPI Center for Urban Resilience and Environmental Sustainability (CURES) in Fall 2021: a state-wide survey of municipal managers and county supervisors (80+ respondents), and a community outreach day-long engagement session in Springfield. Attendees will learn about community sustainability related priorities and barriers to successful project implementation, as well as some specific sustainability programs available to communities.

4:30 p.m. Conference Adjourns

In Dedication to Donald R. Norton, Sr.

The 33th Annual Rural Community and Economic Development Conference is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Donald R. Norton Sr. (1937-2021) who, working with Hon. George H. Ryan, then Lt. Governor, spearheaded the State of Illinois Rural Revitalization Initiative in 1986-87. As the first Governor’s Rural Affairs Council director, Don’s insights and leadership set the stage and direction for many resulting rural policies and practices including an annual statewide conference to make community development leaders in Illinois aware of the best thinking and practices across the U.S.

The conference, starting in 1987, has continued every year. Clearly, Don’s insights opened opportunities, policies, and programs that made life better for rural Illinois residents.

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