

5-1-1990

S.T.A.R.T. Exchange Vol. 01, No. 01

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Center for Public Affairs Research, UNO, "S.T.A.R.T. Exchange Vol. 01, No. 01" (1990). *Publications Archives, 1963-2000*. 534.

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START



Exchange

A NEWSLETTER FOR S.T.A.R.T. COMMUNITIES

Volume 1 Number 1

May 1990

Welcome to the first issue of S.T.A.R.T. Exchange. Through this quarterly newsletter, we hope to keep you abreast of what Nebraska communities are doing with their S.T.A.R.T. projects. In addition, future issues will provide you with information on economic development

techniques and strategies that small communities are successfully using around the United States.

S.T.A.R.T. Exchange must be what you want—please let us know how we can best meet your information needs.

Schuyler Plan Moving Full Steam Ahead

Schuyler, Nebraska, facing an enviable "problem" of growth, decided to plan for its future instead of react to it. About 30 residents began strategic planning in the summer of 1988 and are going strong on their action plan.

This proactive attitude was the force behind hiring an economic development director, compiling a housing survey, and involving young people in the community. Schuyler is now prepared to assist, as well as reap, the benefits of the current expansion of the EXCEL meat packing company and other local development.

Schuyler is a living, growing example of the S.T.A.R.T. strategy at work. In the past two years, leaders in this eastern Nebraska town have worked hard to map out their future and to make their plans work. In true S.T.A.R.T. style, they developed a strategic action plan that's in continuing operation.

Back in August of 1988, Schuyler leaders worked with CPAR to put together an economic development project. This was one of the pilot projects that led to the S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development Self-Help Kit. Alan Borchert, then the local manager at Peoples Natural Gas, served as the local leader.

Although the S.T.A.R.T. model wasn't yet fully developed, the path Schuyler took will be familiar to S.T.A.R.T. participants.

First Things First

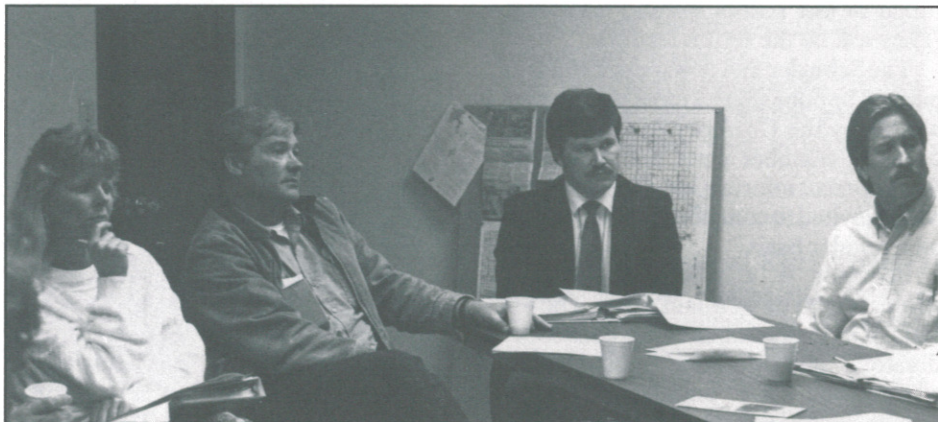
Schuyler brought together 24 community and business leaders to begin analyzing factors impacting Schuyler/Colfax County and its development, and incorporating the top priority strategic issues into an action plan.

The results of the community attitude survey identified several initial driving issues, such as an undersupply of skilled workers, no vacancies for potential new business, lack of industry diversification, leakage of dollars from the community, etc. Based on this feedback, five key issues were chosen for Schuyler's strategic action plan: the need for economic diversity, a possible imbalance

between supply and demand for labor, lack of affordable housing, a lack of communication and positive self-image, and the need for an economic development coordinator.

Getting to Work

Once the agenda was set, plans got underway to assure the strategic action plan would be carried through to success. An economic development coordinator, Barb Marxsen, was hired to act as a liaison between the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation. Her job as coordinator allows her to focus all her efforts on Schuyler's economic development.



Discussing the Action Plan from left to right are Nancy Wolfe, Keith Moore, Don Nordell, and Dave Reinecke.

Next, each issue of the action plan was assigned to a group of volunteers. Under the direction of their dynamic leaders, the groups have been studying and solving the problems cited by the steering committee.

Dennis Kahl's committee has taken a proactive approach to the issue of a lack of economic development by studying the potential impact that could occur if highway 30 were to become an expressway. To target new industry, this committee also conducted an inventory of all available buildings in the Schuyler area. A local realtor developed a catalog to inform potential new businesses of the property available in Schuyler.

To combat the housing problem, which most heavily affects employees at the EXCEL meat packing plant, Don Nordell leads a team that is exploring ways to expand the amount of affordable housing. This effort has caught the attention of area realtors and land owners, who have joined the committee.

Keith Moore leads a group of volunteers who are working to improve Schuyler's communication and self-image. A new video and brochure are being created to help improve and promote Schuyler's image, both internally and externally. The project will be funded by the Schuyler Development Company.

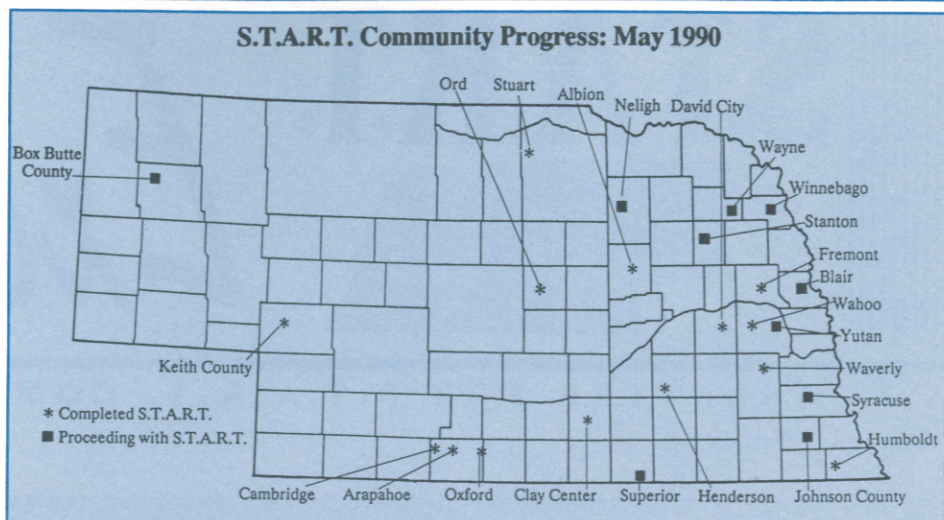
A Community Effort

The Future Farmers of America of Schuyler High School are also showing their enthusiasm in the economic development effort. FFA is working with the school art department to create a community logo. It will be displayed on a sign at the economic development office as well as on office business cards.

According to Marxsen, student involvement is essential to Schuyler's long-term success. "The future is enrolled in our school system," she said. "They will be the future leaders."

The Schuyler Sun newspaper will also pitch in by publishing a monthly column, written by the Chamber of Commerce, covering chamber news and economic development information. Guest writers will be invited to contribute to the column on a regular basis.

Schuyler is a model of ongoing dedication to its well-laid plans. The efforts of its economic development coordinator, hard-working action plan committees, and enthusiastic community members have combined to put Schuyler on the right track to success.



Clay Center Kicks In

Public relations and promotion are two key elements in successful community planning. However, getting the "greater" community involved can be challenging.

Clay Center's leaders have found the answer through their innovative and persistent efforts to create excitement for S.T.A.R.T. and future development. The involvement of the youth of Clay Center, the wide usage of the media and town meetings, and the commitment of businesses are only a few examples of these efforts.

Clay Center residents aren't letting S.T.A.R.T. get by them. They're pitching in to help it succeed, instead.

After a community-wide press conference kicked off the project December 20, several local businesses and organizations have become involved in the project. Their enthusiasm and support have contributed to Clay Center's effort to revitalize and add business to the area.

Multimedia Coverage

Clay Center was the first S.T.A.R.T. community to have its press conference broadcast on television. Douglas Cable, the local cable station, helped broaden the audience and strengthen the impact of this important event.

The Clay County News has also supported the community by providing wide coverage of the S.T.A.R.T. program.

Students Join In

Eighth graders at Clay Center Public School played a vital part in the promotion of S.T.A.R.T., as well. The Lion's Quest Skills for Adolescents class, sponsored

by the Lions Club to promote student interest and learning in the community, made phone calls to ensure that surveys were being completed, and then personally collected them from each household.

"The 60 percent survey response was a success because of the eighth graders," said Darryl Peterson, Clay Center's local leader.

Alice Schumaker, who manages the S.T.A.R.T. program, noted that the students' enthusiasm is important because it shows they care about their future as Clay Center citizens.

A Business Boost

Local businesses, such as Commercial State Bank, showed their support for S.T.A.R.T. by pledging funds for the program. According to Derwin Redline, the bank's president, Commercial State pledged \$2,500 in matching funds and created a "community reinvestment" certificate of deposit from which specific S.T.A.R.T. projects will receive one percent of the dividends.

Public Relations Liaison Jay Sullivan sent out 32 resolutions to area businesses and received a 100 percent response, also showing strong support for the S.T.A.R.T. program.

Turning the Tide

"Before the press conference there was a 'wait and see' attitude," Peterson said, "but the tide has turned and there is support, enthusiasm, and a willingness to work for S.T.A.R.T. We want to ensure the future of Clay Center as a vibrant community, and this is our chance to put the town back to what it was."

Keith County: Five Communities Pull Together

Regional cooperation is an important economic development strategy in a context of limited resources and changing economic priorities. In today's world, no community can operate in a vacuum.

Keith County is the first S.T.A.R.T. project to successfully incorporate the thoughts and needs of five communities in the county and the surrounding rural residents. This ambitious effort promotes the "what is good for our neighbor is also good for us" attitude of successful regional projects.

When Keith County started its regional S.T.A.R.T. project, participants were aware of the difficulties involved in regional economic development, such as town pride and competitiveness. Leaders decided early on that even if it were more difficult, working together to achieve economic goals would be worth the effort.

Bringing Them Together

The communities involved in the project include Ogallala, Paxton, Brule, Roscoe, and the North Lake/Keystone area. According to Bob Roeser, Keith County Economic Development Corporation coordinator, the communities are very excited about the program. "We are having phenomenal cooperation," said Roeser.

Keith County started with a Town Hall meeting last May in which several economically sound communities came

to share their ideas on economic development.

"Key people attended this meeting," Roeser said, "such as businessmen, farmers, ranchers and bankers. We listened to what other communities were doing, and that got the enthusiasm started."

A Special Approach

Part of the effort included redesigning the S.T.A.R.T. attitude survey to determine each individual community's concerns. Citizens answered questions that specifically affected their own communities, as well as those affecting the entire county. Roeser said the questionnaire was designed this way because the actions and attitudes of one community can affect the actions and attitudes of nearby communities.

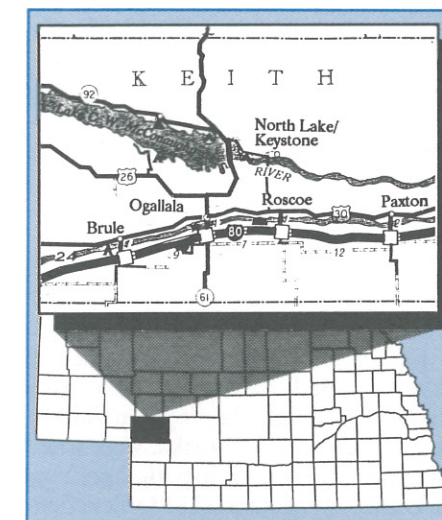
"This format allows us to compare the concerns of a 68-year-old man in Ogallala to the concerns of a 68-year-old man in Brule," Roeser said, "because what happens in Brule affects Ogallala."

Once the results were tabulated, the steering committee members from each community took the key issues to their own citizens and held meetings to discuss questions and concerns, particularly on county-wide issues.

Spur Club Drive

The force behind Keith County's economic development is the Spur Club

fund drive chaired by Doug Teaford of First National Bank of Ogallala and Jim Prange of Adams Bank and Trust of Ogallala. According to Teaford and Prange, the drive has provided the grass roots support for the project.



The Spur Club, created and managed by the Keith County Economic Development Corporation, set a goal to raise \$25,000 in pledges over the next three years. Thanks to community bank leadership, businesses and private donations, it was able to raise \$30,000 in pledges. The money has funded the economic development office staff and financed various S.T.A.R.T. projects, including an agri-business committee's trip to agricultural companies in eastern Nebraska.

The county banks provided the initial leadership by encouraging several business and private donations. Those who contribute to the fund become members of the Spur Club and are kept informed of activities. Their names are printed in the Keith County newspaper as a source of pride and encouragement to other Keith County residents.

"It really helped accelerate the program," Prange said. "This way everybody knows who is part of the project."

One for All

One of the keys to Keith County's success is the willingness of five communities' residents to see themselves as neighbors in a county-wide effort. They have learned that each community has its own strengths to be developed, and that by helping each other they truly help themselves.



Doug Teaford, S.T.A.R.T. Steering Committee co-chairman presents Community Attitude survey results at the Paxton meeting. Also on hand were S.T.A.R.T. Steering Committee members (from left) Tim Holzfaster, Jerry Snyder, Pat Pelster and Chuck Theiler.

Spotlight on Alice Schumaker

Alice Schumaker hasn't always spent her days traveling Nebraska's highways, visiting S.T.A.R.T. communities and teaching their leaders how to plan their futures. And that's not all she does now. It only seems that way.

Alice is a Research Associate at the Center for Public Affairs Research. She manages the S.T.A.R.T. Economic Development Program by coordinating all S.T.A.R.T. activities including readiness assessment, marketing, scheduling, organizing resource citizens and facilitators, providing technical assistance, and developing materials.

Alice entered public administration after 16 years as a medical technologist. In 1966 she earned her bachelor's degree in pathology from the University of Nebraska Medical Center, then practiced as a medical technologist in California, Colorado and Nebraska. She earned her master's of science in pathology from the University of Nebraska Medical Center in 1982 and became a clinical supervisor of immunology. Alice went back to school and graduated with a master's of public administration in 1987.

Why the career switch?

"I felt that I wanted to broaden myself from a very technical career to one that was more people oriented," Alice said. "This job enables me to apply a lot of the skills that I learned in my previous career, such as writing, research, and public speaking." But in spite of the similarities, Alice admits that this job has challenges of its own. "It's a constant learning process."

Since her management of the S.T.A.R.T. program began one and a half years ago, 14 communities have finished the program, and Alice is currently working with seven others. She clearly enjoys her work.

"I'm excited about S.T.A.R.T. because it has the potential to help organize people and help them see what they want their future to be," she said.

The most interesting part of her job, Alice says, is seeing the results of her efforts. "It's thrilling to see a business locate in a community, whether it was directly or indirectly a result of S.T.A.R.T. Having grown up in a rural area (McCook), I am familiar with many of the problems facing rural Nebraska communities, and I want to help them grow and develop."

In addition to her busy work schedule, Alice devotes time to her position as president-elect of the Nebraska chapter of the American Society of Public Administration and holds memberships in the Nebraska Industrial Developers Association and the Community Development Society.



Alice's interest in community development isn't limited to the S.T.A.R.T. program. When she isn't clocked in at CPAR, she and her husband, Rand, remodel homes in the older Omaha neighborhoods such as Bemis Park and the Joslyn Castle area. They are active members of the Old Omaha Midtowne Association, and active parents of a 16-year-old son, Eric.

Published by the Center for Public Affairs Research (formerly Center for Applied Urban Research) and mailed free upon request.

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