



NEWS RELEASE

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Rural Innovation Is Subject of New Forum

AUSTIN (Oct. 11) -- Ten state organizations and a national policy institute have announced the launch of a new program to promote improvement through innovation in Texas small cities and towns. The program, the Texas Rural Innovators Forum or “TRIF”, is a series of forums featuring national speakers on the most innovative practices in rural America.

“We all know that if we keep doing the same things, we are likely to end up with the same results,” says TRIF coordinator, Bobby Gierisch, “and for many rural regions, that just means continued, slow erosion of the economy and social institutions.”

“Those who fail or refuse to innovate, may not die,” Gierisch continued, “but we are fooling ourselves if we think we can sit on the sidelines and let things get better on their own.”

The goal of TRIF is to bring the leaders of rural Texas into personal contact with the very best spokespeople from the most successful and innovative rural development projects and programs in America, and to bring leaders of rural Texas together with one another to share their own energy and ideas for improvement. Local elected and volunteer leaders in all fields are invited to participate in the Forums.

USDA Rural Development Director Bryan Daniel said, “This is a great opportunity for rural leaders from across Texas to hear real people talk about things that really work. Our small cities and towns truly need new ideas, and we need them now.”

The initial Forum is October 19 in Austin. It will feature Vaughn Grisham, Director of the McLean Institute at Ole Miss discussing the “miraculous” economic development successes of Tupelo, Mississippi, over half a century; and Becky Anderson, Director of HandMade In America, an extraordinary example of community and regional development based on the “invisible industry” of arts and crafts in western North Carolina. U.S. News and World Report called Becky Anderson one of America’s top 20 visionaries in 1999.

The kick-off Forum will be held at the Texas Municipal League Center in Northeast Austin. It will run from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm and include a box lunch. Details are available on the TRIF website, www.ruraltx.org.

“TRIF speakers will present a mix of theory and practice, but this is all about action and improvement at home, on the ground – not pie-in-the-sky,” according to Carlton Schwab, director of the Texas Economic Development Council, one of the program sponsors.

“And let me assure you, you won’t be sleeping through these presentations,” he continued, “these are not just good speakers, they are extremely interesting, even entertaining!”

A new Forum will be held every six to eight weeks. The second one is scheduled for December 11 in Bastrop.

Future speakers include Dr. Mark Drabenstott, founding director of the Center for Regional Competitiveness in Kansas City; Phillip Baldwin, President and CEO of Southern Bancorp in Arkadelphia, Arkansas; Leslie Scott, Director of the North Carolina Center for Rural Entrepreneurship; and Phil Anderson of the Indiana Rural Development Council.

Texas sponsors are the Texas Association of Counties, the Texas Municipal League, USDA Rural Development, Texas Cooperative Extension, the Office of Rural Community Affairs, Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., the Texas Leadership Institute, the Texas Economic Development Council, the Texas Community College Rural Community Development Consortium, and the William P. Hobby Center for Public Service at Texas State University. The Rural Policy Research Institute of Columbia, Missouri, is a national sponsor.

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