



Committed to the future of rural communities.

## Almost Heaven WV Mountain State Rural Express



**“Wild, Wonderful &  
Open For Business”**

**July, 2008**

### Message From WV State Director Rick E. Rice

I hope you are enjoying Summer, even though it took forever to get here. Whether it is Spring, Summer, Winter or Fall—Rural Development employees are out and about in rural communities spreading the word of the many programs offered by USDA Rural Development.

If there is anything happening in your area, I encourage you to get Gail Bennett involved. Gail is our Public Affairs Specialist and eager to tell all of West Virginia about USDA Rural Development and its many facets.



If your community or you, as an individual, would like to get in contact with your local USDA Rural Development office, you may call the State Office customer toll-free telephone line at 1-800-295-8228 to be put in touch with the office that serves your area

and find out what we can do for you and/or your community!

I am now in my 11th month as State Director and have thoroughly enjoyed every minute with USDA. Once again, this quarter has proved to be a phenomenal one. To name just a few of the reasons this quarter was so great—we observed Earth Day, we celebrated National Homeownership Month, and Rural Development employees assisted many individuals, organizations and communities in their financial endeavors.

### Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity Celebrates National Homeownership Month

Rural Development State Director Rick Rice was honored to be a speaker at a public ceremony on June 23 in Franklin, Pendleton County, WV in observance of National Homeownership Month. Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity sponsored the event on this, what turned out to be, beautiful sunny day.

Rice spoke to the crowd that included federal, state and local government officials, lending representatives and residents of the surrounding area, about the im-

portance of homeownership and how Rural Development provides such financing needs across *The Mountain State*.

Mary Elisabeth Eckerson, district director for the Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, R-2nd District, was on hand to read a letter from the Congresswoman that further encouraged citizens to be responsible homeowners.

The event concluded with a forum held in the afternoon with Pendleton County residents and repre-

sentatives to address the needs of the county. Wendell Alt, Rural Development Specialist, discussed the Rural Development programs that are available to assist individuals and the community.

**Pictured (l to r):** John Connor (Development Director for Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity); Judy Hott (County Commissioner, Pendleton County); Chris Stovel (Field Representative for Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito); Mary Elisabeth Eckerson (District Director for Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito); Rick Rice (State Director, WV USDA Rural Development); Michelle Connor (Executive Director/CEO for Almost Heaven Habitat for Humanity); Bill Loving, Jr. (Executive Vice President/CEO of the Pendleton Community Bank); Peter Minter (Field Office Director for the Office of Housing and Urban Development); and Dianne Goff Chrysler (Housing Programs Director, WV USDA Rural Development).



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#### Investment in WV (FY 2008) through mid-July

<b>Community Facilities (CF):</b>	
CF Direct	\$ 8,603,000
CF Grants	\$ 292,500
<b>CF Economic Impact Initiative Grant \$ 251,000</b>	
<b>Housing:</b>	
538 Guaranteed	\$ 1,750,000
Rental Assistance	\$ 2,971,192
502 Direct	\$ 14,020,450
504 Loans/Grants	\$ 974,786
HPG	\$ 198,676
Self-Help	\$ 650,000
502 Guaranteed	\$ 58,883,253
502 Guar. Refinance	\$ 373,477
RCDI Grant	\$ 234,643
<b>Business:</b>	
IRP	\$ 750,000
Guaranteed B&I	\$ 14,591,000
RBEG	\$ 815,261
Enterprise Comm. Grant	\$ 123,152
<b>Utilities:</b>	
Loans	\$ 26,165,240
Grants	\$ 10,181,230
<b>Total Obligations: \$ 141,828,860</b>	

## Rural Development Employees Volunteer “Sweat Equity”

If “a picture is worth a thousand words” then these photos tell it all. Rural Development employees—National, State and Local—volunteered “sweat equity” during National Homeownership Month to help families build and/or repair their homes.

USDA Rural Development’s National Homeownership Month theme was “Own Your Future.” Homeownership enables families to accumulate wealth, stabilizes neighborhoods and promotes healthy families and strong communities.



**Pictured** are self-help build volunteers from USDA Rural Development, Telamon Corporation, NCALL and the future homeowners on June 12 in Hedgesville, WV. Rural Development National Office volunteers included: Donn Appleman, Carolyn Bell, Antonio Burkett, Cynthia Stout, Shalane Joyner, Kristin Lough, Felecia McGray and Myron Wooden.



State and Local USDA Rural Development volunteers included: State Director Rick E. Rice, Area Director Craig Burns, Housing Program Director Dianne Goff Cryler, Guaranteed Housing Specialist Scott Mullin, Rural Development Specialist Ruth Barron and Rural Development Area Technician Mary Ann Head.

Under the self-help program, the head of the household puts in 15 hours of work a week on building their new home.



The family as a whole contributes 30 hours per week, until construction is complete, performing that work in their spare time so it does not interfere with their regular work schedules.

education class where they learn, among other things, how to manage and maintain a new home and budget.

Through April 2008, USDA Rural Development has invested almost \$3.6 Billion to help more than 33,000 families buy homes. They have also helped thousands make needed repairs, such as health and safety improvements.

Candidates for the self-help program go through a home-buyer

**“For many Americans, owning a home represents freedom, independence, and the American Dream.”**

—President George W. Bush  
in his 2008 National Homeownership Month Proclamation

## Rural Entrepreneurship and Solar Energy

Fresh, locally grown, organic food is the focus of Red Bud Farm. Their location in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia, close to the Baltimore-Washington market, assures plenty of demand for their products.

Owners Haroun Hallack and Clarissa Mathews grow over



15 acres of produce each year for local consumption.

The need to move toward producing vegetables year around led to the addition of a greenhouse. The initial goal was to extend the growing season by starting plants sooner. However, the cost of propane to heat the greenhouse during the early Spring months cut into the profit of having an earlier crop. A lower cost heat source was needed. Solar heat seemed like the perfect solution.

Through the internet, the owners discovered USDA Rural Development’s Section 9006 Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Grant program. They applied for a 25% grant toward the cost of installing a solar hot water system. The application was successful and the project began in 2007.

Installation of the system took longer than expected, due to the lack of certified installers in West Virginia. Haroun Hallack took the initiative and attended training through North Carolina State University to become a certified installer.

The new system is now in operation and was utilized during Spring 2008. Initial savings, even though West Virginia had a mild Spring, were \$250 per month. During a typical year, the savings would be much greater.

The propane tank has been removed and future plans are to expand the greenhouse to grow crops during the winter months.

USDA Rural Development congratulates Haroun Hallack and Dr. Clarissa Mathews on the successful completion of the first Section 9006 Renewable Energy project in West Virginia.



**Pictured above:** Haroun Hallack, co-owner of Red Bud Farm, stands proudly in front of the first Section 9006 Renewable Energy project in West Virginia. **Pictured to the left:** Red Bud Farm’s greenhouse production.

## West Virginia USDA Rural Development Celebrates Earth Day 2008

April 22, 2008—That date marks the 38th anniversary of Earth Day. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer announced on this date that 48 communities in 30 states were selected to receive more than \$164 million in loans and grants for infrastructure improvements to help the environment.

West Virginia State Director Rick E. Rice proudly announced there were two awardees in *The Mountain State*. Mason County Public Service District was awarded a \$3,781,000 Loan and \$1,919,000 Grant while Wayne County's Lavalette Public Service District was awarded a \$2,165,000 Loan and \$1,656,000 Grant.

"Mason County PSD funds will be utilized for a water system extension project to roughly 273 new customers in various areas of Mason County, WV," Rice explained. "Lavalette PSD funding will also be utilized for a water system extension project to ap-

proximately 177 new customers, but in the Crockett and Millers Fork areas of Wayne County, WV."

Lavalette PSD held a kickoff celebration for their project on April 30, 2008, beginning at 11 AM at the Crockett-Booten

United Methodist Church, Lavalette, WV.

Several Federal, State and County officials attended where House Speaker Richard Thompson reigned as Master of Ceremonies.

The church was filled by the residents of the proposed new service area as State Director Rick Rice signed the ceremonial check while stating his sincere appreciation on behalf of USDA Rural Development to be part of such an important project.

Earth Day is observed annually on April 22 to raise awareness about the role citizens, businesses and communities can play in protecting the environment. Since the first Earth Day celebration in 1970, the event has expanded to include participation by citizens and governments in more than 175 countries.

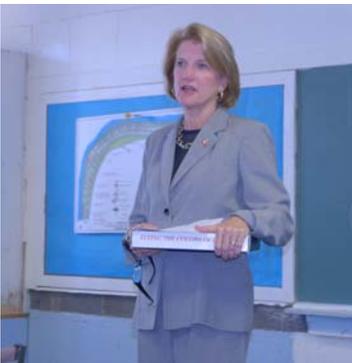


**Pictured (l to r)** at the Ceremonial Check Presentation is Rural Development Community Programs Director Randy Plum, Community Programs Loan Specialist Tracey Rowan, State Director Rick E. Rice, Area Specialist Virginia McDonald, Area Director Alan Harris, and Darrell Wellman, General Manager, Lavalette Public Service District.

## CAEZ Celebrates Approval of Rural Business Enterprise Grant

Central Appalachia Empowerment Zone (CAEZ) of West Virginia Corporation was approved for a \$200,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant through USDA Rural Development program funding in March, 2008.

On May 29, 2008, a check presentation ceremony was held in Wallback, Clay County, WV to celebrate the funding.



Rural Development funds will be used to purchase the Valley Fork Elementary School Building near Clay, WV. The building will house rural learning programs and provide educational instruction and job training instruction related to potential employment or job advancement for adult students.

The building will also house a day care center and commercial kitchen for lease by small, private business enterprise.

WV USDA Rural Development State Director Rick E. Rice stated, "This project is expected to create 12 jobs and assist three businesses, assisting Rural Development in fulfilling its mission to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans."



**Pictured above (l to r):** CAEZ Board members Mardel Nevins—Clay; Peter Silitch—Braxton; Russell Deering—Nicholas; Michael Martin, Chair—Mt. Hope; Connie Lupardus, Director; Linda Rhodes, Secretary; Honorable Shelley Moore Capito—R-2nd District; Earl McCune—Clay; and West Virginia USDA Rural Development State Director Rick E. Rice.

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito (**pictured to the left**) was on hand to lend her support to CAEZ and recognize USDA Rural Development efforts to finance this project.

The Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program provides grants for rural projects

that finance and facilitate development of small and emerging rural businesses, help fund distance learning networks, and help fund employment-related adult education programs. To assist with business development, Rural Business Enterprise Grants may fund a broad array of activities.

## Rural Development “Steps It Up”

With some 250 working days per year, USDA Rural Development Specialist John Fullen spends nearly all of his time securing financial assistance for low-income residents seeking a new home or home repairs.

But, for one of those days, Fullen finds himself with hammer in hand and volunteering to assist a family in need.

“It certainly is nice to be able to get out and see the end product of federal dollars and the partnership we have with SARA (Southeastern Appalachian Rural Alliance) coming together,” stated Fullen.

In the spirit of Homeownership Month, Fullen and fellow Rural Development employees Stephen Wetherbee (Area Director) and Michael O’Dell (Student Assistant)

traded in their computers and air-conditioned offices for carpenters’ tools and toiled over a porch under the hot summer sun. Other volunteers included employees of the Greenbrier Housing Authority and SARA, Inc.

Beginning with labor provided by volunteers from Bethlehem Farm, the newly built porch serves as a second means of egress for Joan Farren and her family, a standard safety measure for all homes.

“It means the world to me,” Farren exclaimed. “It would have taken me a long time to accomplish that on my own.”

Fullen attributes success of the project to Rural Development’s ongoing working relationship with SARA. He further emphasizes the everyday relationship, stating “Rural Development loans and



grants combined with SARA’s Housing Preservation Grants (HPGs) can be utilized to do the exact same type of projects.”

“These programs are especially important in light of our increased energy costs, which makes families’ budgets extremely tight. It’s good we can take care of some of these basic needs,” he said.

**Pictured above (front row, l to r)** Lisa Saunders (Greenbrier Housing Authority), Michael O’Dell, Edith Sisung (Greenbrier Housing Authority), Stephen Wetherbee and John Fullen; **(back row, l to r):** Joey Prieboy (SARA) and Ed Pluchar (SARA).



USDA Rural Development has invested more than \$90 Billion since 2001 for equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. More than 1.7 Million jobs have been created or saved through these investments.



## NACS and NASP Hold Annual Meeting

On June 17, 2008 Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary USDA Rural Development Jack Gleason and USDA Rural Development Housing Programs Administrator Russell Davis addressed over 150 members of the National Association of Credit Specialists (NACS) and National Association of Support Personnel (NASP).

NACS and NASP are voluntary associations of USDA Rural Development employees. Association members meet annually and draw their annual meeting atten-

dance from all 50 states. This year’s meeting was held in Lincoln, Nebraska.

“NACS and NASP both have a relationship with USDA Rural Development National Office in Washington, DC, that exists no where in government or private business where management allows employees at all levels to express their concerns and ideas in a resolution process from implementation into the delivery of the programs administered by USDA Rural Development,” commented Bill Terrell, past

NACS National President. “Additionally, management through task forces can test drive, so to speak, their possible changes or new designs with experienced staff.”

In addition to Mr. Gleason and Mr. Davis, 11 other senior USDA Rural Development staff addressed the association members in a panel discussion of questions and answers. Senior staff represented various USDA Rural Development offices and programs, including Information Technology, Water & Environmental,

Single Family Housing, Centralized Servicing Center (St. Louis), Business & Cooperative, Multi-Family Housing, Human Resources, and Civil Rights.

For more information regarding NACS, you may contact Bruce Martin at (304) 697-6033, ext. 115 or by e-mail at [Bruce.Martin@wv.usda.gov](mailto:Bruce.Martin@wv.usda.gov).

Further information regarding NASP may be obtained by contacting Phyllis Buettner at (304) 242-0576, ext. 105 or by e-mail at [Phyllis.Buettner@wv.usda.gov](mailto:Phyllis.Buettner@wv.usda.gov).

## Rural Development Participates in Annual “Take Our Daughters and Sons To Work®” Program

April 24, 2008. The fourth Thursday of each April is denoted as the annual “Take Our Daughters and Sons To Work®” Program.

As adults in a fast-paced society, we face the challenge of balancing work, family, community, and personal responsibilities. This program encourages children to think about these issues.

Rural Development employees stressed this year’s theme,



“Making Choices for a Better World” and discussed recycling and other subjects relative to the theme with the six youth participants.

Those participating were **pictured below, l to r—front row:** Mikhaila Missimer (daughter of Chris & Shelley Missimer), Jessica Gillespie (daughter of Mark & Roni Gillespie), and Peyton Missimer (son of Chris & Shelley Missimer); **back row (l to r):** Rachel Cryslar (daughter of Jim and Dianne Cryslar), Zach Taylor (son of Harry Taylor), and Ben Taylor (son of Harry Taylor).

Throughout the day, they each helped do multiple tasks for the office—shred, copying, labeling, stamp envelopes, counted and placed promotional items in storage, put notebooks together, and

faxed documents—just to name a few of the many things they assisted with.

With the “learning and doing” behind them, they enjoyed an ice cream cake as a reward from the employees for all their hard work and help.

State Director Rick E. Rice presented each participant with a Certificate of Appreciation while expressing his support of the program and its participants.



Georgette Bilotta, Housing Specialist, is **pictured above** with three of the six participants.



## Community Connect Grants

### Community Connect Grants

The Community-Oriented Connectivity Broadband Grant Program is designed to provide financial assistance in the form of grants to eligible applicants that will provide currently unserved areas, on a “community-oriented connectivity” basis, with broadband transmission service that fosters economic growth and delivers enhanced educational, health care, and public safety services.

**Who is eligible?** Entities that are legally organized as one of the following are eligible:

1. An incorporated organization
2. An Indian Tribe or tribal organization
3. A state or local unit of government
4. A cooperative, private corporation, or limited liability company organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis

**Who is Ineligible?** Individuals and partnerships are **not** eligible.

### What are the basic eligibility requirements?

- Matching funds of 15% of requested grant amount
- Serve a rural area where Broadband transmission service does not exist
- Serve **one and only one** community recognized by the U.S. Census or Rand McNally
- Deploy basic broadband transmission service, free of charges for two years, to all critical community facilities
- Offer basic broadband transmission service to residential and business customers within the proposed service area
- Provide a community center with at least ten computer access points, free from charges for two years

### Grant Program Features

- Annual Competitive Application
- 15% Required Matching Contribution
- \$50,000 Minimum
- \$1,000,000 Maximum

### What are the eligible purposes of grant funds?

- Construction, acquisition, or lease of facilities to deploy broadband transmission services to all critical community facilities, and to offer such services to all communities and businesses in proposed service area
- Improvement, expansion, construction, or acquisition of a community center (funding has restrictions)
- End-user equipment to carry out project
- Purchase of land, buildings, or building construction

- Operating expenses for critical community facility for the first two years not to exceed \$250,000 with limitations set forth in Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

### Elements of Scoring

- Rurality of the Community = up to 40 points
- Median Household Income = up to 30 points
- Benefits Derived = up to 30 points

For more information or an application package, please visit [www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/commconnect.htm](http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/commconnect.htm).

The Fiscal Year 2008 application deadline has passed; the Fiscal Year 2009 funding opportunities and contact information will soon be posted at <http://www.grants.gov/>.



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<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wv>



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