



## Vermont Council on Rural Development

### 2007 Annual Report

#### From Paul Costello, Executive Director

Welcome Friends and Partners!

2007 marked conclusions and exciting new beginnings in the work of the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

Dedicated to universal and affordable broadband for rural VT, VCRD has continued its town-by-town **broadband aggregation** efforts (over 50 towns all told), expanded **WiFi** sites in the Northeast Kingdom, and is turning a corner through a new project in line with Governor Douglas's e-State initiative: "**e-NEK**" will help towns and businesses in the Kingdom develop new broadband applications, expand business and residential use of the internet, and improve community communications.

VCRD has been proud to be involved for the last two years with Vermont's value-added forest products industry in an **EDA Forest Products Marketing Grant** to expand and unify marketing around Vermont's unique brand. It has been exciting to see the ideas developed through the Vermont Forest Product Council in 2003 find funding, with the help of Senator Jeffords and his staff, and move forward to advance this vital part of Vermont's rural economy.

The VCRD-founded and produced **Vermont Rural Energy Council** completed its final report, "**Strengthening Vermont's Energy Economy**," in August. The report analyses economic opportunities for in-state renewable energy and posits a set of strategic action steps to advance efficiency, electric generation and fuel development.

VCRD's **Creative Communities Program** completed its strategic planning with 12 towns and cities throughout Vermont that are working to expand downtown vitality, incubate new and innovative businesses, and, in many different ways, use their cultural resources to lever economic progress. VCRD also produced two **Community Visit** processes in 2007 to jumpstart community development work on locally defined priorities in **Richford** and **Derby**. As a result of these two programs over 30 committees and hundreds of local volunteers are leading projects forward today.

Based on what we have heard and seen in communities throughout Vermont over the course of the past two years, VCRD has come to see the need for a "**community visit**" at the state level, a process of coming together to discuss our values, priorities, and goals as Vermonters. In September, we created the **Council on the Future of Vermont** to ask Vermonters to consider the key challenges and opportunities we face. We believe that this dialogue, done in partnership with communities, philanthropists and a broad coalition

of Vermont state and local organizations, can build something of a manifesto on Vermont values, defining common priorities of residents, and setting a consensus framework that will condition public policy and collaborative action for the foreseeable future. We look forward to a dynamic year of dialogue, surveying, and research in learning from Vermonters!

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## We've Moved!

VCRD has moved to new offices at 43 State Street, Montpelier. Our email and mailing address remain the same, however, please note our new phone numbers.

### VCRD STAFF

Paul Costello, Executive Director [vcrd@sover.net](mailto:vcrd@sover.net) (802) 223-5763

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Sarah Waring, Manager, Council on the Future of Vermont [cfv@sover.net](mailto:cfv@sover.net) (802) 223-6098

Al and Laura Duey, Broadband Contractors [info@VTRuralBroadband.org](mailto:info@VTRuralBroadband.org) (802) 467-1266

## Staff and Board Updates

VCRD bid farewell to **Helen Labun Jordan** who ably led the Creative Communities Program to its finale this year. Helen has assumed a post at the VT Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, where she will have the opportunity to share her expertise in the development and promotion of markets for local foods.

VCRD welcomes **Sarah Waring** as program manager for the Council on the Future of Vermont. Sarah, a native of the Northeast Kingdom, returns to the state from her work with the Sonoran Institute in Montana. Watch for her as she travels around the state taking the pulse of the future in community forums.

VCRD has been greatly enriched by the service of board member **Barbara Grimes**, Manger of the Burlington Electric Coop. Barbara completed her full term limit with the board in 2007 and we extend our deepest appreciation for her contributions.

**Richard White** who served as Secretary of the board and Chair of the Vermont Rural Energy Council has resigned his position due to his semi-retirement from Community National Bank. Richard has shown exemplary leadership at VCRD, and we wish him the best.

New board members in 2007 are: **Harvey Smith** (Farm Services Agency), **Kevin Dorn**, (VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development), **Thomas Hark** (Vermont Youth Conservation Corps) and **John Bramley** (Windham Foundation). Welcome!

## Vermont Rural Energy Council

Of the many topics on the minds of Vermonters, energy – its cost, availability and environmental impact – is surely at the forefront. The Vermont Rural Energy Council (VREC), convened in June of 2006, completed its work in June of 2007 and offered in its final report an assessment of opportunities in Vermont’s energy economy. The report contains recommendations that contribute to the vibrant discussion around energy taking place across Vermont, from grassroots organizations to the legislature.

Written from an economic perspective, the report includes a financial model developed by Economic and Policy Resources that specifies strategic points of development in renewable energy which, when aggregated, can provide substantial benefit through job impacts, expanded markets, and cost savings. The report

also contains 23 recommendations ranging from financial policy and investments to advancing specific sectors.

A companion report, The Vermont Energy Digest, was released in April 2007 to provide a snapshot of existing programs, incentives, and potential markets in renewable energy. The document is a valuable resource for the many organizations and individuals in Vermont who are seeking a baseline of information in this dynamic sector. The report contains models and best practices, resources, and data and analysis for nine energy sectors.

Both reports are available on the VCRD website, [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org). Paper copies can be obtained by contacting the VCRD office at 223-6091 or [vcrd2@sover.net](mailto:vcrd2@sover.net).

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## Council on the Future of Vermont



In the summer of 2007, an idea that experienced a long and careful gestation came to fruition. Since 2006, the VCRD board had contemplated the idea of a ‘statewide community visit’, a maturation of the program that offered residents – one town at a time – the opportunity to reflect on the place in which they lived, and to think together in order to shape a more deliberate and productive future.

*Participants at Southern Vermont College CFV forum.  
Photo courtesy of Lee Krohn*

Hence, the Council on the Future of Vermont (CFV) was born, and through this program VCRD will strive to listen to residents throughout the state, to learn about Vermont from the people who live and work here. Unlike the Community Visit Program, CFV will not offer recommendations, but its final product – projected to be a multi-media resource – will help to inform anyone interested in Vermonters’ perceived values, concerns and aspirations. It is expected that educational institutions, policy makers, citizen groups, businesses and social service agencies will be able to use the information garnered through the CFV to develop programs and policies that are more responsive to items identified as priorities by residents.

This statewide conversation follows a proud tradition of public dialogue in Vermont; from the Commission on Country Life in 1937, to the Commission on Vermont’s Future in 1988, there are a handful of important milestone conversations that have re-articulated Vermont identity and character and helped to shape important decisions.

The Council on the Future of Vermont aspires to reach Vermonters from all walks of life, and in every corner of the state. Here are some of the ways we are reaching out:

**Community Forums:** CFV holds public evening forums open to all in every county of the state. Smaller focus groups comprised of students, farmers, veterans, senior citizens, chamber members or other demographic, social or vocational groups will meet with team members during the day. In the next few months, forums will be held in Island

Pond, St. Johnsbury, and Middlebury. As of March 2008, more than 500 people attended forums in Orange, Bennington, Rutland, Franklin, Lamoille and Grand Isle Counties.

**Website:** CFV is very excited to announce the launch of a dynamic new webtool: [www.futureofvermont.org](http://www.futureofvermont.org) . This website, designed by Teresa Langston of NetSpin, provides summaries of forums, a calendar of events, news, the opportunity to take a survey and an online discussion. The survey is anonymous and administered by UVM’s Center for Rural Studies. The website is a great way to keep up with what we hear, and for you to tell us what you think! Join the conversation online and stay in touch with the project at [www.futureofvermont.org](http://www.futureofvermont.org).

**Stakeholder Forums:** Watch for these in 2008. VCRD will meet with organizations and associations throughout the state.

As the program progresses through 2009, CFV and VCRD will conduct research on past trends and studies, analyze input, conduct a phone survey, solicit written contributions, and more. With community partners like the Vermont Community Foundation and Vermont Public Television, this exciting initiative has the potential to reach many Vermonters. We hope you will visit the website frequently to learn what is new in this program. For more information, contact Program Director, Sarah Waring at [cfv@sover.net](mailto:cfv@sover.net).

Many thanks to CFV members who are providing guidance to the overall program.

## **CFV Council Members**

**Sue Allen**, Barre-Montpelier Times Argus

**Paul Bruhn**, Preservation Trust of Vermont

**Tom Debevoise**, Woodstock Dairy Farmer (Chair)

**Kara DeLeonardis**, RU12? Community Center

**Steve Gold**, VT Agency of Human Services, (retired)

**Chris Graff**, National Life Group

**Cheryl Hanna**, VT Law School

**Wanda Hines**, Burlington Community and Economic Development Office

**Brian Keefe**, CVPS

**Richard Mallary**, US Congressman, VT Legislator, retired

**Ellen McCulloch-Lovell**, Marlboro College

**Donna Rader**, VT Community Foundation

**Charlie Smith**, The Snelling Center

**Emily Stebbins**, UVM

**Greg Stefanski**, Laraway Youth and Family Center

**Fran Voigt**, New England Culinary School

**Laurie Zilbauer**, Northeastern Vermont Development Agency

**Brian Byrnes**, Vermont Community Foundation (through Feb. 2008)

**Rick Manahan**, People's Trust of Vermont (through Feb. 2008)

**Paul Costello**, VCRD, Executive Director

**Sarah Waring**, VCRD, Program Director



*Grand Isle, VT- Photo courtesy of Wayne Fawbush*

## **Creative Communities Program**

### *Program conclusion and summer conference*

The Creative Communities Program (CCP) was a two-year project funded by Jane's Trust that brought VCRD to 12 Vermont communities as they explored way to stimulate their towns' cultural and economic opportunities. On July 18, 2007, the Vermont Statehouse was transformed by a celebration of this program and its participants, with art and cultural displays, speakers, and representatives from many communities who have worked enthusiastically to invigorate their towns. VCRD's annual summit was an opportunity to showcase ideas, share successful models and look ahead at ways to maintain the momentum built through the program.

The conference featured speakers Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie, House Speaker Gaye Symington, and Resolution chair, Bill Schubart, each of whom offered a perspective on the creative economy. The diversity of their understanding of just what the creative economy is – from family businesses to agriculture to futuristic health care – illustrates how fluid, expansive and full of potential the topic is. A panel discussion with Alex Aldrich (VT Arts Council), Jim Saudade (Department of Housing and Community Affairs), Gerianne Smart (Smart Communications), Joe Fusco (Casella Waste Systems), and Ellen McCulloch Lovell (Marlboro College) provided fresh insights, and participants adjourned to working groups for animated conversation from community members working 'on the ground' in a variety of creative projects.

There were nearly 200 attendees at the conference, and from their efforts a core of priority recommendations were offered at the day's end in the following topic areas:

- Advancing Agricultural Innovation
- Building a Creative Economy Region
- Developing Arts and Communities Facilities
- Developing Downtown Activity and Accessibility
- Expanding Partnerships Between Cultural Organizations
- Incubating Creative New Businesses
- Marketing the Creative Economy
- Using the Web as a Creative Economy Tool



*CCP Participant Sharon Rives – Photo courtesy of Wayne Fawbush*

The concept of the creative economy has created a stir throughout the country, and its reliance on entrepreneurship, community support and flexible thinking make it a splendid fit for Vermont. Although the Creative Communities program has concluded, its legacy is felt in the energy, interest and dedication to its ideals displayed at the conference and in towns throughout the state. The benefits of the program have spread far beyond the original 12 participating communities, as the marketplace of ideas continues to grow.

Some of those ideas are captured in the program's final report released in January 2008. The document contains profiles and highlights of participating communities. A few of the projects initiated under the program include:

- **Developing Trails to Tour Local Farms, Art Venues and Area Highlights -**  
*Lake Champlain Islands*
- **Creating an Arts Center and Business Incubator –***Hardwick*
- **Invest in State of the Art Communications and Technology –***Manchester*
- **Pioneer Alternative Energy –***Middlebury*
- **Establish a Learning Community –***Plainfield*
- **Create a Heart of Vermont Collaborative –***Randolph*
- **Hold a Harvest Festival –***Richmond*
- **Create an Open Air Market –***Rutland*
- **Organize Art and Community Events –***St. Albans*
- **Develop an Eastern Avenue Park –***St. Johnsbury*
- **Build Leadership Campaign –***Windsor*

A complete report, which details many more projects underway in these and other communities, can be downloaded from the VCRD website.

Another component of the final report is a DVD which provides case studies, information to assist towns interested in setting up a creative community planning process, a complete guide to potential resources, detailed reports from twelve towns, and creative economy studies from Vermont, New England and beyond. To obtain your free copy, contact [vcrd2@sover.net](mailto:vcrd2@sover.net).

Finally, VCRD has developed a resource page devoted to the creative economy on its website, with video, reports, photos, resource lists and more. To read the full text of conference recommendations and report, and to access the resource page, visit [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org).



*CCP participants, Hardwick, VT*

## Community Visit Program

VCRD conducted its Community Visit Program in Richford and Derby in 2007. This program, now in its tenth year, provides a structure for residents to consider strategic directions for their communities, focus on specific concerns in a methodical way, and ensure resident participation in the development of solutions.

**Richford** began its participation in the program in April of 2007 – the second time this Canadian border town has received a Community Visit. Tremendous progress has been made in Richford since 1998, including development of a superb health care center, affordable housing, a vibrant supermarket, successful grant applications, and an abiding connection to the town among residents. The second visit provided an opportunity to step back, assess points of progress, identify ongoing challenges, and reinvigorate the community around common goals.

By the conclusion of the four month program, task forces formed to address the following issues: **Job Creation and Retention**, **Law Enforcement**, and **Image and Communication**. These citizen committees will work to expand business opportunities and promote economic development, address concerns about public safety, and will work to actively develop and promote a positive image of the town.

Although **Derby** is also a Canadian border town, participants in the program there considered issues unique to that community. The structure of two

incorporated villages, one town government, an expanding commercial sector, geographic distance from services, and a diminishing rural landscape prompted discussion around issues of infrastructure, identity, and development. While a small group of participants offered valuable ideas affecting the fabric of life, including recreation, family life, and mental and social health, by far the greatest participation occurred in forums addressing municipal and development issues.

Derby residents ultimately selected three topics for task forces to address: **Commercial Development**, which will focus primarily on securing a ‘box store’ retailer, **Merger**, which will gather and disseminate data on possible merger structures and impacts, and **Open Lands and Natural Resources**, which will ensure that natural resources are preserved and effectively used.

VCRD began its 2008 Community Visit Program in Killington in January. If your community is interested in this program, contact Paul Costello at [vcrd@sover.net](mailto:vcrd@sover.net).



*Richford community members – photo courtesy Fred Schmidt*



## Broadband

Charged by the federal Farm Bill to help coordinate state, federal and non-profit rural development efforts in Vermont, VCRD has worked for eight years to build communications and collaboration between all partners working toward the goal of universal and affordable high-speed broadband access in Vermont. In the past year, VCRD has served as the convener of the **Broadband Working Group** which brings together leaders from the VT Telecommunications Authority, the Public Service Department, Department of Information and Innovation, Agency of Transportation, USDA Rural Development, Senators Leahy and Sanders Offices, Northern Community Investment Corporation, and Northlink. Together we are making progress.

VCRD now has three active broadband field projects led by Laura and Al Duey of Burke.

The **Vermont Rural Broadband Project** has provided consultation and/or aggregation services to over 50 Vermont towns and continues to assist individuals and rural towns in determining their broadband options and how to obtain broadband service. The project maintains a web site, [www.VTRuralBroadband.org](http://www.VTRuralBroadband.org), which has information on local broadband efforts and other broadband topics, and a database of individuals who need broadband. As broadband offerings expand within the state or other broadband issues arise, we pass this information to local projects and individuals.

The Project continues to assist individual towns in their efforts to measure local broadband demand and connect with potential broadband providers, but increasingly the focus is turning to larger, regional efforts. In the spring of 2007, having worked with several local broadband projects in the Orange County area, we brought together representatives from nine towns with a fiber network expert to explore the possibility of a regional fiber project. The resulting project, the East Central Fiber Network, was approved at 27 town meetings in 2008, and there are plans to begin building the network this year.

As broadband availability slowly grows in the Northeast Kingdom, another project, **ConnectNEK**, is helping small businesses, tourists and local residents by building a series of WiFi hotspots throughout the region.

New broadband services often struggle with low subscription rates because so few residents have any experience with broadband. To help overcome this, VCRD obtained a USDA grant to pilot broadband education efforts in three Northeast Kingdom communities. The **e-NEK Project** will work with advocates in each community to identify small businesses and individual residents who could benefit from better use of the Internet, and will facilitate training on the needed skills. The local advocates will also select some community-wide interests that could be served by the Internet, such as community calendars, local business directories, or online community forums. Currently, the Hardwick area and the Barton/Glover area have been selected as target communities, and have begun to organize e-communities.

## **Forest Products Marketing Program**

The VCRD/EDA Forest Products Marketing Grant concluded in 2007 and the program has served as a catalyst for innovation and improved economic opportunity in the value-added wood products sector in Vermont. Through this program, recognition of the value of the Vermont Brand has been substantially strengthened, new markets have been developed, and many participants in initiatives developed under the grant have seen increased sales and a more secure or expanded employment base.

The Forest Products Marketing Grant was developed to create a unified strategy within the industry to encourage a strong and positive consumer association with the Vermont Brand, leverage partner resources and pool industry resources to greatly expand the wood products marketing presence, and provide new venues and opportunities for retail sales. All of these goals have been resoundingly met, with industry members responding vigorously to all programmatic areas developed under the grant.

Some highlights of the 2007 initiative include:

- The Essential Buyers Guide – 110 companies are participating in a dynamic online marketing presence
- Technical Assistance – 28 companies received training in business development and marketing. 18 companies received assistance with website development or website enhancement through the program.
- Forest Heritage Trail – 59 businesses are participating in studio tours. 11 Woodland tours have been developed through new forest-to-products partnerships.
- Guide-by-Cell – Visitors can listen to the stories of 12 different woodworkers and receive tour information via cell phone. 260 stories have been heard to date.
- Vermont Fine Furniture and Woodworking Festival – A premier event rated one of the Top Ten Fall Events by the Vermont Chamber of Commerce. Reported revenues increased 31% over 2006. Attendance of 2,400 visitors represents an increase of 33% over 2006.
- National Trade Show Presence: Las Vegas World Market Show, Providence Fine Furnishings Show, New York City Architectural Digest Home Show, Build Boston Residential Design Show, Vermont Home and Garden Show.
- Lodging and Product Placement – Over 100 product placements including Welcome Centers, Art Galleries, Vermont Statehouse, Vermont inns, hotels, and guest lodges.

VCRD has been fortunate to have the leadership, vision and energy of VWMA in the implementation of this grant. We would like to extend our congratulations to VWMA, whose Woodworking Festival garnered the Vermont Chamber of Commerce Top Ten Fall Events, and for their receipt of the 2007 Governor's Award for Tourism and Marketing Excellence.

## Thank you!

VCRD receives financial support from Federal, State and foundation grants, project funders, and membership contributions. We would like to thank the many contributors who support our work in service to Vermont's rural communities.

### VCRD 2007 Members

<b>Individual</b>		
Dawn Andrews	Leon Berthiaume	John Bloch
Vaughn Collins	Kate Costello	Paul Costello
John Ewing	Edward & Cheryl Heneveld	Marie Houghton
Faith Brown & Jennifer Silpe	Tom Johnson & Ina Smith	Peggy Kannenstine
Candy Koenemann	Lee Krohn	Stephanie Lahar
Michael & Sandra Levine	Charles Lief	Christine Lilyquist
John Magnant	Edgar May	Robert McBride
John McClaughry	Susan McCormack	Pat Moulton Powden
Jenny Nelson	Richard Peck	Andrew Perchlik
Christopher Roy	William & Kate Schubart	Susan Spaulding
Emily Stebbins	Peter Thoms	Robert Winkler
<b>Organization</b>		
Addison County RPC	Biomass Energy Resource Ctr.	Bradford Community Dev.
Brattleboro Housing Authority	Central VT Community Action	Central VT Solid Waste Mgt.
Chittenden Country RPC	Franklin Cnty. Industrial Dev.	CV Office Economic Opportunity
Grn Mt./Finger Lake Nat. Forest	Lake Champlain Chamber	Lamoille Cnty. Planning Com.
Landworks	Lyndon State College	Marlboro College
Northeastern VT. Devel. Assn.	Northern VT RC&D Council	Northfield Savings Bank
Orton Foundation	Preservation Trust	Rockingham Arts & Museum
Rutland Regional RPC	Simon Pearce	Sustainability Leadership Corp.
Sydney Lea Living Trust	Town of Johnson	Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee RPC
Union Bank	UVM Ctr. for Rural Studies	VEDA
VT Forum on Sprawl	VT Natural Resources Council	VPPSA
VT Association of Realtors	VT Community Loan Fund	VT Energy Investment Corp.
VT Fuel Dealers Association	VT Gas Systems	VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
VT Wood Manufacturers	Washington Cnty. Mental Health	Wells River Savings Bank
Woodstock Foundation	Workforce Development Council	
<b>Leadership</b>		
Ben & Jerry's	Brattleboro Savings & Loan	Chittenden Bank
Citizens Bank	Community National Bank	Barbara Grimes
Merchants Bank	Northwest Reg. Planning Com.	NRG Systems
Passumpsic Savings Bank	Randolph National Bank	TD Banknorth
Verizon		
<b>Conference Funders</b>		
ACCD Downtown Program	Greater Burlington Ind. Corp.	Housing Vermont
Lake Champlain Chamber	Preservation Trust	Com. on Future of Econ. Devel.
Verizon Foundation	VT Agency of Agriculture	VT Arts Council

VT Housing & Conservation		
	<b>In-Kind Contributions</b>	
Chittenden Bank	Economic & Policy Resources	IBM
National Life Group	USDA Rural Development	Kavet Rockler & Associates
	<b>Grant Funders</b>	
Economic Development Administration	Jane's Trust	State of Vermont
USDA Rural Development	UVM Center for Rural Studies	VT Community Foundation
New Castle Fund	Green Mountain Coffee Roasters	Union Mutual Insurance
High Meadows Fund	National Life Group	Vermont Mutual Insurance
McClure Foundation		

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### **2007 VCRD Board of Directors**

Tricia Coates, Liaison, Congressman Welch's Office  
 Jolinda LaClair, USDA Rural Development  
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 Chuck Ross, Liaison, Senator Leahy's Office  
 Harvey Smith, Farm Services Agency  
 Kevin Dorn, VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development  
 Chip Evans, Workforce Development Council  
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