

Rural LISC's Pennsylvania Initiative is one of 11 original demonstration sites for LISC's *Building Sustainable Communities* strategy. Five program goals define this larger vision: 1) expanding investment in real estate; 2) increasing family income and wealth; 3) stimulating economic activity; 4) improving access to education; and 5) supporting healthy environments and lifestyles.

Rural LISC is successfully implementing the program in two rural Pennsylvania communities: Uniontown, led by Fayette County Community Action Agency; and Tamaqua, led by the Tamaqua Area Community Partnership. Uniontown, located in the heart of once prosperous Fayette County in northern Appalachia, has experienced severe economic distress over the past several decades, largely due to the decline of coal mining and other heavy industry. The result has been more than 30 years of poverty for many residents. Tamaqua, in eastern Pennsylvania's anthracite coal region in Schuylkill County, was a thriving community throughout the heyday of coal production in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but began declining, along with many other anthracite communities, in the 1950s as coal mines began tapering off. The decline continues with Tamaqua showing a 10 percent decrease in population in the last Census.

Rural LISC began its Pennsylvania Initiative *Building Sustainable Communities* program in 2006, establishing the positive environments needed to ensure that all residents of varied income levels are provided the opportunities and tools to build assets, participate in their communities and become part of the mainstream economy. The results so far speak for themselves.

In Fayette County, \$6,832,750 in private and public funds has been invested by Rural LISC, leveraging \$62 million in total project development costs. These funds are supporting the creation of 150 homes, more than 200,000 square feet of commercial space and community facilities, and assisting 40 new business enterprises that will create 200 jobs.

Monies include \$3.5 million for housing and real estate, \$50,000 for increasing family income and wealth, \$182,000 to stimulate economic development, \$283,500 for improving access to educational opportunities, and \$2.9 million toward supporting healthy environments and lifestyles.

In Tamaqua, a total of \$2,892,086 in private and public funds has been invested by Rural LISC, leveraging \$14.2 million in total project development costs, including \$2.5 million for housing and real estate; \$25,000 for increasing family income



Uniontown, Pa. Pop. 12,422



Tamaqua, Pa. Pop. 7,174



*Uniontown Before and After:*  
 (top) Uniontown Family Homes, an LIHTC project employing an in-fill strategy replacing vacant land and older blighted structures.  
 (right) One of 30 new Uniontown Family Homes. This home was completed and occupied in 2009.



and wealth programs; \$92,000 to stimulate economic development; \$184,000 for improving access to educational opportunities; and \$57,500 to support healthy environments and lifestyles.

The strategic and comprehensive approach through the *Sustainable Communities* initiative moves away from the traditional community development practice, where agencies work alone and on singular goals. Rather, it brings agencies together as partners and helps them pursue multiple goals in a holistic approach.

The rural *Sustainable Communities* model can be likened to a strawberry plant. The focus of activity is the main plant (the core community), with runners moving out in all directions—creating additional growth in nearby locations. Thus, work in one community will stimulate new opportunities in completely different areas. Employment training here can result in job development there. Or affordable housing development can influence positive results in educational outreach programs.



Since beginning the *Sustainable Communities* program in 2008, Rural LISC is seeing not just the success of two demonstration sites, but further development of the sustainability concept as it takes shape among partner CDCs across 31 states. *Building Sustainable Communities*, as communities and CDCs are discovering, is a comprehensive effort based in cooperative relationships among a broad spectrum of players, and it is appearing at a level of scale and impact that is truly remarkable. The newly emerging stories of change and impact on the ground give hope about the future of rural communities, particularly in these times.

*Tony Lyons (NEF) and Fred Banuelos (former President, Alliance for Building Communities) at groundbreaking for 401 Hazle Street in Tamaqua.*



The New 401 Hazle Street in Tamaqua with 14 affordable apartments. Tamaqua Area Community Partnerships played a key role in securing this first NEF-financed LIHTC project for Rural LISC in Pennsylvania.