

2003 UNITED GROWTH FOR KENT COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT

From its beginning 6 years ago, there have been three fundamental strategies that have undergirded the programs and activities of *United Growth*: public education, capacity-building and empowerment, and applied leadership and policy considerations. The following is a brief summary of our 2003 activities in each of these components.

Public Education

Equipped Citizens With Tools To Make Sound Land Use Decisions. A step-by-step manual on neighborhood-based planning was published and distributed to all staffed Grand Rapids neighborhood associations. Statewide distribution is being explored. Thank you to the Steelcase Foundation and Urban Cooperation Board grants for providing funding for the manual.

Provided Decision-Makers And Citizens With The Tools To Make Sound Land Use Decisions A Citizen Planner Program was held at Gaines Township Offices that was attended by 51 individuals from 22 municipalities in Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent and Ottawa Counties. An Urban Cooperation Board grant funded eight scholarships for Kent County residents. A Citizen Planner Program will be held from May – September at the Muskegon Area ISD for Kent, Muskegon and Newaygo County residents.

Facilitated Forum For Local Land Use Organizations Hosted the 4th annual Project Partners meeting at Calvin College's Prince Conference Center, with over 60 individuals attending. A panel of five Michigan Land Use Leadership Council members (Jim Brooks, Dan Gilmartin, Mick McGraw, Larry Merrill, Hans Voss) spoke about their experiences on the Council and next steps.

Tour de Sprawl Co-sponsored a Tour de Sprawl for local decision-makers with West Michigan Environmental Action Council, Michigan Land Use Institute, Sierra Club, and the Diocesan Social Justice office.

Encouraged Media Coverage Of Local Land Use Projects Developed and distributed a directory of Kent County land use organizations to over 85 local media outlets in an effort to increase media coverage of land use issues and what local organizations are doing to implement the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council recommendations.

Mixed Income Neighborhoods Research Provided assistance to MSU professors Dr. June Thomas and Dr. John Schweitzer of their research of mixed income neighborhoods in Grand Rapids. Focus groups were held in 3 Grand Rapids' neighborhoods.

Providing An On-Line Resource Use of the United Growth web site (www.msue.msu.edu/unitedgrowth) continues to grow. In 2003 we received over 9,000 more hits than 2002. The highest month of activity was April with 2,963. International activity continues to increase from a minimum of 17 visits in 2002 to a minimum of 83 visits in 2003. *This Land is Your Land* curriculum, Resources and Related Links and Upcoming Events had the highest number of visits.

Capacity-Building & Empowerment

Organizing Producers To Promote Ag Tourism Assisted the Ridge Agricultural Economic Partners (REAP) in securing 501(c)3 status and launching themselves as an independent organization. REAP is working on publishing the 2004 Fruit Ridge Country Market Guide and updating their web site (www.fruitridgemarkets.com) where Fruit Ridge products are sold.

Building Neighborhood Capacity Continued to provide technical assistance to South West Area Neighbors (SWAN) in implementing activities that will achieve their vision for the revitalization of their neighborhood. The Business Action Team has decided the traffic calming and streetscaping improvements that they would like on West Fulton.

Coordinated Award Winning Student Project To Revitalize West Side Business District Partnered with the South West Area Neighborhood (SWAN) and an MSU Urban Planning Practicum class to conduct a revitalization study of the West Fulton Business District. This student project included an external conditions survey of structures, demographic information on the area, and recommendations for improvements on West Fulton. It received an outstanding student planning project award in 2003 by the Michigan Society of Planning. People and Land provided funding for the student's research.

Applied Leadership and Policy Considerations

Discussing Land Use Issues With Lawmakers The Joint Legislative Committee met with the following decision-makers to discuss local land use issues, the work of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council (MLULC), the work of *United Growth for Kent County* and what resources United Growth can offer to legislators: Congressman Vern Ehlers, Sen. Bill Hardiman and Chief of Staff Dave Hildenbrand, Sen. Wayne Kuipers, Sen. Ken Sikkema's Legislative Aid, Amy Richey, Rep. Jerry Kooiman, Rep. Mike Sak, Rep. Glenn Steil Jr. and Rep. Joanne Voorhees. Joint Legislative Committee meetings and work were supported by a grant from People and Land.

Supporting The Creation Of Affordable Housing The Joint Legislative Committee produced information pieces on legislation that would create an affordable housing trust fund. Area organizations have been contacted to gauge their interest in forming a coalition to support this effort.

Preserving Prime Farmland In Kent County United Growth's Rural and Urban Committees supported the development of the Kent County Purchase of Development Rights Program. In 2003, members kept apprised of the program and many individually wrote letters of support for grant requests and helped distribute information on the program to landowners and the public.

Encouraged Large Retail Stores To Buy Locally Rural and Urban Committee members wrote letters of support to Meijers, Spartan Stores, D& W, G. B. Russo's and Harvest Health to thank them for their participation in the *Select Michigan* pilot program and encourage them to continue promoting Michigan and locally grown agricultural products.

Working To Meet The Planning And Zoning Needs Of Local Communities Created and disseminated an assessment of planning and zoning needs to all local units of government in Kent County. 20 out of 39 communities responded.