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Spoon River College Gets Grant for Distance Learning Network

Doug Wilson, the Illinois director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, has announced that Spoon River College (SRC) will receive a \$189,288 grant to implement a state-of-the-art videoconferencing system. The interactive technology will allow them to greatly expand access to many of the school's programs to residents in their five-county district.

The videoconferencing system called SpoonCast will make more workforce training, continuing education, certificates and degrees available to residents and improve the local workforce and business climate. The college also will be able to offer dual credit classes to high school students.

The college serves residents in portions of Fulton, McDonough, Schuyler, Mason and Knox counties, most of whom live in rural areas miles from the college's main campus in Canton. The system will allow them to make more types and levels of classes available at their other sites.



USDA Rural Development Illinois Director Doug Wilson presented a check for \$189,288 to Spoon River College for an interactive videoconferencing system to provide classes at multiple sites. Next to Wilson, on the left, are Congressman Phil Hare's Economic Development Director Andy Rowe, and from Spoon River College President Dr. Robert Ritschel and Board Member Don Heller.

"By extending their resources to people where they live, SRC will have an immeasurable impact on the education and training of the residents of west central Illinois," Wilson said at the

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Funds Available for Community Facility Projects

Community Programs can make and guarantee loans to develop essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Loans and guarantees are available to public entities such as municipalities, counties, and special-purpose districts, as well as to non-profit corporations.

Loan funds may be used to construct, enlarge, or improve community facilities for health care, public safety, and public services. This can include costs to acquire land needed for a facility, pay necessary professional fees, and purchase equipment required for its operation. Examples of essential community facilities include: nursing homes, hospitals, libraries, fire trucks, community centers, day care centers, etc.

For the direct loan program, interest rates are fixed and determined by the median household income (MHI) of the area being served and the type of project. For the guaranteed loan program, the interest rate is the lender's customary interest rate for similar projects, can be fixed or variable and are determined by the lender and applicant. Loan repayment terms may not exceed the applicant's authority, the



Pictured is Dr. Michael Hambrick, M.D. and 'patient' Teresa Smith, Chief Financial Officer both with Memorial Hospital in Carthage, IL. The hospital received a \$897,000 direct loan for the purchase and installation of a computer system along with electronic notebooks. This will expand and enhance the delivery of all healthcare in the Hospital's rural service area. They will be able to receive and transmit valuable information to other health care facilities to help in the care and treatment of patients.

useful life of the facility, or a maximum of 40 years. For more information on this program, contact your area Illinois Rural Development office:

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/il/ao-list.htm> . •



Director's Corner

For anyone who has been watching or reading the news lately, the story of the economy and the housing crisis in the United States has been dominating the headlines. With all these stories about the large number of housing foreclosures, failing banks and economic bailouts, how about some news on the positive side?

**Dwight Reynolds
Area 4 Director**

The USDA Rural Development Guaranteed Single Family Housing program is stronger than ever. In fiscal year 2008, there were almost \$7 billion in loans funded nationally. In Illinois alone, Rural Development funded 3,921 loans for more than \$320 million. Both nationally and in Illinois, Rural Development set records in the guaranteed program.

Unlike many of the low down payment loan programs that have seen problems over the last

year, the Rural Development guaranteed program's overall delinquency rate has changed very little. This is possible because the Rural Development guarantee allows the lender to make a 100 percent mortgage with a fixed rate of interest for 30 years. Homebuyers know what their principle and interest payment will be on their mortgage and they do not have to worry about it going up like they would with some of the adjustable rate mortgages.

So as fiscal year 2009 begins, Rural Development will continue to guarantee no down-payment mortgages made by Illinois lenders to allow qualified rural residents the opportunity to purchase their dream home. ▪

Spoon River College (continued from page 1)

announcement at SRC's Technology Center. "This region will enjoy the benefit of the college's efforts for years to come."

SRC will use the system to make college credit courses, along with workforce and community education available to more residents, increasing the college's ability to meet the needs of area businesses, assist small business entrepreneurs, and expand job preparation opportunities.

"Using the college's internet network for data and telecommunications, the interactive video conferencing component will allow the college to offer more courses to more sites making higher education more accessible to hundreds of rural residents of west central Illinois," said SRC Dean of Instruction James Genandt.

The grant will be used to install and operate an interactive, state-of-the-art distance learning system. It will increase SRC's ability to utilize its staff, offer all levels of classes at its

campuses in Havana, Rushville and Canton, and improve access to certificate and associate degree programs. ▪



Eagle Mortgage Gets Top Honor from USDA



Pictured l to r: Ron Riggins, Susie Bahnfleth, Wanda Gardiner and Mona Wehking of Eagle Mortgage and Rural Development Specialist Chris Mowrer.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development awarded Peoria's Eagle Mortgage Brokerage Corporation one of its top honors. Rural Development Specialists Diana Belknap and Chris Mowrer presented Eagle Mortgage President Ron Riggins the Award for Rural Development Excellence. The award recognizes businesses

and organizations that have demonstrated superior achievement in delivering the agency's programs.

central Illinois communities we serve" Belknap said. "Eagle Mortgage has used our guaranteed housing program to make homeownership more affordable for 887 borrowers since they started using the program. With our backing, they committed more than \$57 million in the last 10 years."

"To make sure that potential homebuyers know that owning a home is within their means, Ron has made numerous presentations on our Guaranteed Single-Family Housing, including hosting homebuyer seminars in Havana and Macomb as well as speaking at Realtor luncheons and meetings," Belknap said.

"We appreciate the commitment Ron and his staff Wanda Gardiner, Mona Wehking and Susie Bahnfleth have made to help people buy homes in the communities they serve," said Mowrer. "It's good for the local economy when more people own homes."

"They have shown a genuine commitment to the rural west

...



Adams Electric Cooperative Board President Rick King and General Manager Jim Thompson accept a check from Illinois Rural Development Director Doug Wilson for a grant to help purchase a wind turbine. The check was presented at the substation where electricity will be uploaded from the wind turbine just down the road.

Adams Electric Awarded Grant for Wind Turbine

Federal officials visited the future site of a 900 kilowatt wind turbine that will be erected by Adams Electric Cooperative near Mt. Sterling. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development awarded the co-op a \$450,000 grant to help them purchase and install the turbine.

As part of their efforts to lead the state in the use of clean, renewable energy sources, the cooperative decided to purchase the \$1.9 million turbine as an environmentally friendly power source to supplement their current power supplies and act as a hedge against rising fuel costs.

The grant was awarded through USDA Rural Development’s renewable energy and energy efficiency program. The program provides financial assistance to agricultural producers, cooperatives and rural small businesses to support renewable energy projects across a wide range of technologies including biomass, geothermal, hydrogen, solar and wind energy. It also is available to help recipients capitalize on efficiency measures that reduce their energy consumption and improve operations.

“Our energy grant and loan program is designed to provide environmental and economic benefits,” Illinois Director for Rural Development Doug Wilson said. “Small businesses, ag producers, and the local economy benefit when we take advantage of a renewable energy sources readily available in rural Illinois.”

The turbine will be erected where tests have found some of the fastest wind speeds in the area. It will be located next to one of the Cooperative’s substations where the power generated by the turbine will be uploaded. The site will be visible from US Highway 24.

“The wind turbine is a great project for our membership and west central Illinois,” said Jim Thompson, the co-op’s general manager. “We have a great wind resource in our area and need to find ways to utilize it. Without the USDA grant, we would not have been able to move forward with this project.”

“This project illustrates Adams Electric Cooperative’s commitment of bringing clean renewable energy to our area. Wind is one of the best renewable energy sources because it produces no pollution, no combustion and no byproduct that would harm the environment,” Thompson said.

The cooperative serves 8,400 members and maintains more than 2,190 miles of electric lines in rural Adams, Brown and Schuyler counties, as well as parts of Pike, Hancock, McDonough and Fulton counties in Illinois. ▪

Program Spotlight

Rural Business Enterprise Grants

Purpose: The USDA Rural Development makes grants to public bodies and private nonprofit corporations to finance and facilitate development of private business enterprises. Eligible entities receive the grant to assist businesses; the grant does not go directly to a business.

Applicant: Those eligible include public bodies and private nonprofit corporations serving rural areas.

Eligible Area: Under this program, all areas outside the outer boundary of any city having a population of 50,000 or more and its immediately adjacent urbanized areas are eligible. For eligible areas, visit: <http://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do>

Financing Features:

Grant funds may be used to develop small or emerging private business enterprises in rural areas including:

- acquisition and development of land, easements and rights-of-way
- construction, enlargement, repair or modernization of buildings, plants, machinery, equipment, access streets and roads, parking areas, utilities, and pollution control and abatement facilities
- reasonable fees and charges for professional services necessary for the planning and development of the project
- providing financial assistance to small businesses through a revolving loan fund
- technical assistance for proposed grantee projects

For purposes of this program, a small business is one that will employ 50 or fewer new employees and has less than \$1 million in projected gross revenue. Manufacturing and merchandising businesses may deduct cost of goods sold to determine “gross revenue.”

Less than \$600,000 is usually available each year for RBEGs in Illinois, so grant applications are very competitive. Smaller grant requests have better chances of being funded, and requests for \$99,000 or less receive priority points.

Frequently Asked Questions



Q: Is a non-profit organization an eligible applicant for Rural Development's Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan program?

A: Yes. According to RD Instruction §4279.108 (a), a borrower may be a cooperative organization, corporation, partnership, or other legal entity organized and operated on a profit or nonprofit basis; an Indian tribe on a Federal or State reservation or other Federally recognized tribal group; a public body; or an individual. A cooperative organization is a cooperative or an entity, not chartered as a cooperative, that operates as a cooperative in that it is owned and operated for the benefit of its members, including the manner in which it distributes its dividends and assets. A borrower must be engaged in or proposing to engage in a business. Business may include manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing, providing services, or other activities that will: (1) Provide employment; (2) Improve the economic or environmental climate; (3) Promote the conservation, development, and use of water for aquaculture; or (4) Reduce reliance on nonrenewable energy resources by encouraging the development and construction of solar energy systems and other renewable energy systems (including wind

energy systems, geothermal energy systems, and anaerobic digesters for the purpose of energy generation).

Q: How can our community get financial assistance to build a water system?

A: The Rural Development Water and Waste Disposal (WWD) loan and grant program is available to eligible applicants to construct or improve drinking water, sanitary sewer, solid waste, and storm drainage facilities. Applicants must be public bodies or nonprofit organizations. Facilities must be located outside cities and towns of more than 10,000 people and be unable to finance their needs from their own resources and be unable to obtain credit from commercial credit sources at reasonable rates and terms. Grant funds are limited to applicants serving areas with a median household income (MHI) of less than the statewide non-metropolitan MHI. Grants cannot exceed 75 percent of project costs and are limited to the amount necessary to result in reasonable user rates. ▪

For more on Rural Development's programs, visit us on the web!
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/il>

Area 4 Highlights



Area 4 would like to welcome **Jessica Stone** to the Galesburg Area Office. Jessica is an Area Technician and works primarily with single-family housing loans.

Prior to Rural Development, Jessica was a Realtor® with Mel Foster in Galesburg. She lives in Altona with her husband, Aaron, and her two cats, Kiki and Sasha. In her free time, she enjoys reading, spending time with her family and shopping. Jessica said she is excited to join Rural Development because it combines her experiences in banking and real estate and her desire to help people.

If you are in the Galesburg area, be sure to stop in and meet Area 4's newest staff member! ▪

GRASSHOPPER ICE CREAM PIE
 from the kitchen of Trish Yeager
 Galesburg Office

1 prepared chocolate crumb crust
 4 cups mint chocolate chip ice cream, slightly softened
 1 cup chocolate syrup
 1 dollop pressurized whipped cream
 1 maraschino cherry
 8 tsp sliced almonds



1. Spoon ice cream into crust, gently spreading to fill evenly. Cover and freeze at least 2 hours to firmly set.
2. Remove from freezer 5 minutes before serving. Squeeze one dollop whipped cream onto center of pie, top with maraschino cherry. Cut into 8 slices, placing each on a dessert plate. Spoon 2 tablespoons chocolate syrup over each slice of pie. Sprinkle each plate with 1 teaspoon sliced almonds. ▪



Happy Holidays from Area 4!



A special thanks to: Joan Messina, Barry Ramsey, Dwight Reynolds, Jessica Stone, Jim Vanatta & Trish Yeager for contributing to this quarter's newsletter.



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