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2001 – 2002 CAEZ Annual Report

Executive Summary

The Annual Report of the Central Appalachia Empowerment Zone submitted in January of 2002 noted that 105 jobs were created at the Mt. Hope Industrial Park, Benchmark #28. This was the result of cooperation and hard work by a large number of stakeholders. The 105 jobs grew in 2002 to 552 people employed at the Mt. Hope Park. Closure on another facility at the park is scheduled for January 20, 2003 and another 52 jobs will be added to the list.

Effective administration of Benchmark #15 by the loan committee, the Business Revolving Loan Program has enabled a new business start up in one of our other locations in the Enterprise Community. As a result of our economic development efforts, CAEZ now has a small, but sustainable, income so that our work can continue. More importantly our community is working toward our goal of creating a sustainable community with opportunities that were previously not available.

The major recommendations made by the State Office of USDA were addressed. We have Loan Committee and Board Member Training scheduled for March 2003, continued our marketing efforts (successfully) at the Mt. Hope Industrial Park, continued to update and revisit our benchmarks, and have expanded our financial capability by additions to our Business and Housing Loan Programs.

With technical assistance provided by USDA, the CAEZ continues to make progress toward the creation of a sustainable community. Our current projects are moving ahead, and we have a "vision" of several projects that will allow our current successes to continue. The continued commitment of our people will be the enabler that allows this to happen.

Most Significant Accomplishment

The creation of 552 jobs that pay a decent wage and provide benefits and retirement is a significant accomplishment in any community. In a rural, distressed area with pervasive unemployment, it is overwhelming. This Industrial Park, Benchmark #28, represents a commitment of the people who (1) identified and defined a problem (lack of employment), (2) proceeded to seek, coordinate, grant, borrow, and build, and (3) see 552 people who now have a means to provide for their families. "Significant" doesn't begin to describe this, but I don't know of a better word.

Community Participation

The CAEZ is governed by a 19 member Board of Directors. Local government is represented by a member from each of the five counties served by CAEZ. In addition to government officials, we have

two board members elected by the citizens of each census tract in this Enterprise Community. (7 census tracts, 14 members) The daily contact between board members, the citizens, and the CAEZ Office staff represents true community participation. Our continued use of the committee structure in the decision making process allows for input by the residents of this area. This is the major factor in CAEZ's success as a true community organization.

Partnerships and Alliances

CAEZ continues to work closely with the five county commissions represented on our Board of Directors. This allows us to keep abreast of and aid in local development projects. With support from the West Virginia Development Office, USDA, and other economic development organizations, CAEZ is involved with continued implementations of our strategic plan.

The formation of the Alliance of Champion Communities will allow CAEZ to share information and resources with other communities after expiration of our designation as an enterprise community. We have partnered with 4-C Economic Development Corporation on two projects in our area and continue to work with the Regional Intergovernmental Councils to assist in the development of local projects. CAEZ is a member of the West Virginia Economic Development Council and continues to participate in and support local business development authorities.

Problems/Obstacles

A problem is something that needs to be addressed and an obstacle is something to overcome. Many of the areas within the CAEZ community need infrastructure, primarily a potable water supply. Benchmark #52 was revised to address this need and much working needed in this area.

Pervasive unemployment is the obstacle that is most difficult to overcome. Opportunities in the CAEZ area remains very limited and much of our effort is directed toward this problem.

Solutions

The provision of public utilities in a rural area remains a formidable task. CAEZ will continue to work closely with the Public Service Districts to revise benchmarks to address the needs of our residents. We currently have four projects in our community under consideration for funding and this continues to be a vital part of our strategic plan.

CAEZ will continue to aggressively market the Mt. Hope Industrial Park and pursue opportunities to provide employment. The establishment of our Micro Revolving Loan Fund will enable us to aid in the start up of small businesses and create employment opportunities. We are currently examining possibilities in the tourism area. The development of natural resources represents a unique opportunity to help create a sustainable community.

Best Practices

CAEZ is building local capacity by providing opportunities for our organization to gain skills, knowledge, and experience to more effectively carry out our mission. The dedication of our membership has allowed new business start-ups which have resulted in the creation of over 500 full time jobs. By aggressively pursuing new opportunities and effectively administering what we already have, CAEZ continues to be a sustainable part of our growing community.

Plans/Prospects for the Future

The mission of CAEZ is to coordinate all available resources to create a sustainable community. Our vision of "growing our leaders" needs to continue. Loan Committee training is scheduled for March 2003 and this will result in an informed, committed, group of volunteers who are building community capacity.

CAEZ has received letters of commitment from two more tenants for the Mt. Hope Industrial Park. These tenants will create an additional 65 full time jobs. We are attempting to duplicate this success in other areas of our community.

The establishment of a Micro Loan Fund to assist in the start-up of new businesses will result in additional capacity to pursue our goal of a strong vibrant community.