



Strengthening & diversifying the rural economy of Maryland's Eastern Shore

**Room 2147 Richard A. Henson Center
University of Maryland Eastern Shore**

Princess Anne, MD 21853 USA

Phone: 410-651-6186 Fax: 410-651-6207

Email: dskuennen@umes.edu

Website: http://skipjack.net/le_shore/rural/



ABOUT US

Mission

The Rural Development Center's mission is to strengthen and diversify the rural economy of Maryland's Eastern Shore. We strive to increase incomes, employment, and the local tax base by providing assistance to counties, communities, and businesses. The RDC collaborates with local higher education institutions, governments, and the private sector to accomplish this mission.



Scope of work

Located at the **University of Maryland Eastern Shore**, the RDC assists in public development projects that carry out approved economic development conversion strategies. The RDC assists community groups, non-profit organizations, local elected and appointed officials and private firms. We assist them with plans, loans, grants, projects, and programs for community and county vitality on the nine-county Eastern Shore of Maryland. Emphasis is on public/private partnerships and regional approaches through which communities and businesses jointly prosper. The Center encourages and supports projects that address locally identified needs. It is sensitive to community diversity.

The RDC is a professional community and regional economic development agency concerned with the causes and consequences of social, political, and economic changes in rural areas and the effective influence of rural individuals, businesses, and communities. Applied social and economic science dominates the research and technical assistance work of the Center.

Funding

The RDC is supported by a variety of funding sources including federal and state agencies, private foundations, and Maryland Cooperative Extension (MCE). MCE is supported by county contributions as well as with funds from federal and state sources. Major RDC funders include: U.S. Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration), U.S. Department of Agriculture (Cooperative State Research, Extension, and Education Service and Rural Business-Cooperative Service), the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

History

In 1987, a Lower Eastern Shore Economic Development Task Force commissioned by Gov. William Donald Schaefer included among its findings a recommendation for "a Rural Development Center to alleviate conditions of unemployment and economic instability on the Lower Shore." On September 30, 1988, the executive director of the Somerset County Economic Development Commission, James C.

Threatte, and the president of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Dr. William P. Hytche, made an application for a Rural Development Center to Pat Flynn, Regional Director for the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, who secured funding within a month. Dr. Hytche appointed a diverse, 33-person advisory board whose work in 1989 laid the foundation for the current center. One of the board's first tasks was the search for the center's director. Acting on the board's recommendation, Dr. Hytche hired Daniel S. Kuennen in that capacity in 1990, and his service continues to the present. Through a joint appointment, Dr. Hytche housed the RDC administratively within Maryland Cooperative Extension, the outreach arm of the university system.

On June 2nd, 1995 the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated the Rural Development Center as an EDA University Center. The RDC is a business entrepreneurship center for Rural Business, USDA, and a cooperative center for the Cooperative Service, USDA.

Staff

Full time permanent staff at the RDC consists of a Director, Daniel S. Kuennen, and an Administrative Assistant, Stephanie Harmon.



Daniel S. Kuennen



Stephanie Harmon



PRODUCTS

As Principal:

- **Co-options**
- **Farmers Access to Regional Markets (FARMS™)**
- **Maryland Hawk Corporation**
Hawk Institute for Space Sciences
- **Skipjack.net** ("a unique portal to Maryland's Eastern Shore")
- **Smart Move**

As a Partner:

- **African American Heritage Sites of the Lower Shore**
- **AviTech**
- **Delmarva Low Impact Tourism Experiences (D-LITE)**
- **Lower Eastern Shore Heritage Council**
- **Lower Shore Broadband Cooperative**
- **Maryland Capital Enterprises**
- **U.S. Orchid Laboratory and Nursery**



SERVICES

The Rural Development Center provides grants and loans, grant writing and technical assistance, and product promotion services, primarily to non-profit and public institutions. A summary of recent activities in these regards follows.

Grant Writing

The RDC offers grant and report preparation assistance to companies, agencies, and organizations on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. The RDC has assisted with more than 50 research reports, grant applications, and studies. Research reports have involved faculty from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, University of Maryland College Park, and Salisbury University.

Examples:

- **The Lower Eastern Shore Heritage Plan.** The RDC also assists in its updates. Over 50 federal/state agencies, towns and counties are involved in the process.
- **A \$500,000 grant application** for the construction of a "spec" industrial building for the Princess Anne Industrial Park.
- **Funding proposals** for the development of a hydroponic greenhouse facility on the University of Maryland Eastern Shore campus.
- **Grant pre-application** for the Smith Island Crabmeat Co-op Inc. to construct a mini-crab plant on Tylerton for production of crabmeat.
- Assistance with **a business and marketing plan** for the Ward Wildfowl Museum in Salisbury, MD, a major tourist attraction for the region with carvings and other wildfowl pieces from some of the best carvers in the world.
- **An affordable housing study** in the town of Princess Anne, MD.
- **Economic Development Plans** for the town of Snow Hill, MD as well as Dorchester, Somerset, Worcester and Wicomico counties to develop strategies for attracting clients to a light industry park and to assess the benefits and burdens of the project.
- **A water allocation study** analyzing the impact of increased available water supply on town housing growth potential in Princess Anne, MD.
- **Environmental assessments** for Pocomoke City, MD and **watershed analyses** of previous industrial sites in Somerset and Worcester counties.

Grants

The Rural Development Center provides grants to businesses and organizations on the Lower Eastern Shore. The funds support business startup, expansion and conversion. These funds help local organizations carry out special projects that benefit the economy and maintain a special quality of life. Public agencies receive funding for economic development projects.

Examples of grant recipients and projects::

- **African American Heritage Sites of the Lower Shore**
- **Delmarva Discovery Center**
- **Delmarva Education Foundation**
- **Maryland African American Pride Magazine**
- **Worcester County Tourism website**

Technical Assistance

The RDC provides technical assistance to businesses and organizations in a variety of ways, including:

- **Hosting and sponsoring workshops and conferences** such as the Homebased Business Workshop which provides a forum for home-based business owners to share information about this growing segment of the Lower Shore economy. Some of our major employers started out as home-based businesses.
- **Buying and maintaining computer software and databases** for writing studies, grants, marketing plans, surveys and impact assessment. We also provide this information to businesses and organizations so they can produce presentations and publications.
- **Sponsoring and coordinating satellite downlink sites** so local businesses and organizations can participate in satellite teleconferences such as the National Teleconference on Rural Tourism.
- **Providing facilities and computer and audio-visual equipment to businesses and community groups** for meetings and presentations that relate to rural development issues and economic development efforts throughout the Lower Shore counties.
- **Presenting business and financial technical information to business startup and expansion projects** such as the Yugo Honeybee Project on Smith Island.
- **Funding pilot projects to assess the impact of new technologies** on regional, economic, and cultural development such as these World Wide Web pages you are viewing now.

Revolving Loans

The RDC's Revolving Loan Fund enhances economic activity in Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties. The RLF assists business development and expansion. Funds for the RLF have been provided by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), the U.S. Department of Commerce, and Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED). Our goal is to increase the number of manufacturing jobs in the four counties. *RLF lending priority is given to manufacturing businesses that create permanent jobs.* The Rural Development Center was the first in the State of Maryland to be involved in Defense Conversion projects funded by the Economic Development Administration.

Features of the Loan Fund:

- **Typical Loan Amount** -- Average \$150,000 to \$250,000 with a minimum of \$25,000, maximum of \$500,000
- **Maximum Loan Terms** -- 20 years for real estate and fixed asset; 5-7 years for working capital
- **Interest Rate** -- Below market rates tied to prime interest rate
- **Collateral Required** -- Deeds of trust; machinery, equipment, and fixture liens; personal guarantees
- **Participation Maximum** -- Revolving Loan Fund participation is 50% of the *total* amount borrowed.

Examples of loan recipients:

- **Cambridge, Inc.**
- **Chesapeake East Ceramics**
- **Crabplace.com**
- **Hardwire**
- **Ocean City Monogram**
- **Princess Anne Industrial Park**

Product Promotion

As part of our commitment to support local businesses and assist regional economic development, the Rural Development Center helps companies and business associations market their products. Marketing and promotion is done locally, nationally, and internationally.

A major focus of the RDC since 1991 has been assisting, the **Lower Eastern Shore Heritage Council**, which has acted as a forum for coordination among a wide range of public and private interests concerned about the future of Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore. The Committee is working for broad and continuous community involvement. Committee members have initiated discussions and activities to build a foundation for environmental, cultural and historical awareness in the region and to promote public-private cooperation and partnerships. The Rural Development Center supports these efforts in a number of ways:

- **Developing promotional materials** including a logo and portable photo display
- **Assisting with a quarterly newsletter**
- **Conducting a survey** to analyze public attitudes about heritage tourism and published the results
- **Assisting research and grant preparation, as well as fundraising.**

Additional examples of product promotions by the RDC include:

- **Developing marketing materials** for the seafood industries
- **Supporting regional tourism cooperation and resource-sharing** among Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties, e.g., the **Beach to Bay Trail**
- **Assisting counties in promotion efforts to attract new business** to the area, e.g., **Smart Move**
- **Supporting studies** such as *“Preferences of Crabmeat Buyers: Implications for Maryland's Crab Processing Industry”* that facilitate promotional campaigns in select industries.



SKIPJACK.NET

In June, 2002, the Rural Development Center unveiled **Skipjack.net**, created as “a unique portal to Maryland’s Eastern Shore.” The website aggregates information and links of particular interest to RDC partners in the tourism and economic development communities. It is also a popular site for a more general audience of people seeking to learn more about the area.

Background:

The use of the internet by both the private and nonprofit sectors for advertising, marketing, and other external and internal communication was relatively slow to take root on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. At the turn of the millennium, the Rural Development Center sought to “jumpstart” this development by a) demonstrating the internet’s potential for rapid, inexpensive information dissemination and b) supporting the fledgling efforts of select organizations and companies in the region.

With funds provided by USDA Rural Development, the RDC created Skipjack.net. Select organizations and companies were urged to become members of the “Skipjack.net network” to be listed on and linked to Skipjack.net. Those who chose to become network members had their graphic design and hosting services costs underwritten with Rural Development funds. Network members were encouraged to keep their sites up-to-date, and the RDC provided funds for modest improvements to the sites. An editor for Skipjack.net was hired with RDC funds to develop and update the main page, develop and organize additional links, and communicate with network members to encourage and support their

efforts. With the introduction of a monthly feature article posted on Skipjack's main page and a monthly e-newsletter to Skipjack.net members announcing the arrival of each month's feature, members were encouraged to return to the main page regularly and keep their own sites current.

Skipjack.net now exists as a robust and useful compilation of sites and information about the work of the Rural Development Center and those businesses and organizations it has worked to enhance. An archive of high-quality articles with photographs and illustrations about Maryland's Eastern Shore written with an orientation towards those interested in economic and tourism development has been created and is prominently featured on the site (http://www.skipjack.net/article_all.asp) Network member sites (accessed from the main page) are numerous and easy to find. As network members' familiarity with website management matured, some have moved to their own servers and/or developed more complicated sites for which they are taking full responsibility.



SUCCESS STORIES

Visit http://skipjack.net/le_shore/rural/SuccessStoriesforRuralDevelopment.pdf to read about

- **Maryland Capital Enterprise**
- **Maryland Hawk Corporation**
- **Skipjack.net**

Visit <http://www.skipjack.net/farms/> to see a press release and videos about

- **FARMS™ (Farmers Access to Regional Markets)**
- **Greenhouse Growers Network**
- **Orchids at UMES**

Visit http://www.umes.edu/campaign/AR_report.htm to read the UMES 2004 Annual Report with a feature article about the RDC and the MD Hawk Corporation.



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