New leaders act on vision for Lincoln County communities

The Situation
Lincoln County people were confronted with a challenge in 2008—to get involved with reducing poverty in their communities.

Lincoln County is one of Idaho’s most rural counties. Rugged individualism characterizes the farming and ranching lifestyle where about 31% of workers are self-employed. Each small town has stubbornly held on to its own school system despite their declining funding streams. Cities struggle with aging buildings and lack of infrastructure. A housing boom on small acreages contributed to a culture of commuting parents and residents.

In all locations, educators worry about a lack of local job, social and recreational opportunities for youth. Hispanics make up 23% of the population but as a whole, are not yet involved in county decision-making bodies. Employers like Union Pacific, BLM and schools contribute to surprisingly high per capita income at $30,494, but the County still has a poverty rate of 10.7%.

Confronting isolation, rural independence and traditional systems with the notion that the community could work together to thrive in the future was the task undertaken by Horizons.

Our Response
University of Idaho (UI) Extension at Lincoln County accepted the coaching role and served as hub for the communication necessary to implement a county-wide community improvement project. The commitment was made knowing the Horizons’ framework provided by UI and Northwest Area Foundation would enable local communities to have funding to initiate momentum.

To respond to the challenge by Horizons, citizens needed to understand and act upon a certain fact: Communities, in addition to good schools and roads, require good leaders in order to flourish.

Following the Horizons guidelines, community conversations began in November 2008. Simultaneous capacity building with the Chamber of Commerce, Community Justice, Oasis Christian Fellowship, Adult and Juvenile Probation, and school districts dug deep to recruit participants for the critical step of leadership training. Thirty-four citizens participated in LeadershipPLENTY topics of communication, conflict management and partnership-building. Leaders were energized by each other and motivated to act through the process. In May 2009 the Visioning Rally jumpstarted more leaders to action. Forty-three youth and 148 adults completed a vision offered in both English and Spanish:
Extension continued to work with the action teams encouraging them and providing them with training or technical assistance.

**Program Outcomes**

Four Action Teams initiated by Horizons are active in Lincoln County. Each uniquely works to increase community leadership and reduce poverty.

- The **Farmers’ Market** finished its second season offering economical and healthy foods to local residents. Seven new vendors set up tables. Gross sales in 2009-10 were $8,400. By next year, the Market hopes to accept Food Stamp purchases.

- **Let’s Walk Together** sponsored soccer teams as a way to involve 30 youth in productive, year-round activities. For the first time, high school students, and their families, participated in soccer. The Action Team helped recruit 6 low-income youth to the Horizons Fast Forward Your Future leadership weekend. An intervention for at-risk youth, Ponies for Prevention, often gets referrals through Adult and Juvenile Probation. Approximately 50 boys and girls had one-to-one mentoring and involvement with Ponies for Prevention activities.

- After publishing a guide to promote local businesses and services, the **Resource Guide** Action Team led the County to clarify its identity. Their slogan became *Lincoln County Crossroads – where a rich history meets a bright future*.

- A Basque History Day, Shoshone Historic Walking Tour and a Lincoln County Live History Day were organized by the **Historical Society** Action Team. In order to preserve County heritage and to draw travelers, the Team recently received permission to use a century-old lava rock building to house a new County museum.

- A jointly coordinated **Cowboy Poets & Musicians Gathering** was initiated to provide community financial support and attract tourism. The Gathering was so successful that a larger one is scheduled in Shoshone for 2011.

- The economic impact to local residents of Horizons implementation was $2,600 in catering services alone.

- Leaders use Saddle Up Lincoln County as a non-profit umbrella to benefit the Action Teams and foster healthy, prosperous communities. Some officers have gained grant-writing skills at UI training with the goal of sustaining the organization, the vision and the Action Teams.

**Summary.** Clearly, Lincoln County accepted the challenge to overcome isolation, independence and tradition. Through the University of Idaho Extension Horizons project 2008-2010, citizens found unique ways to work together to accomplish specific economic, cultural and social goals. New leaders emerged to create—then act—upon the community vision.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Christi Falen, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension, Lincoln County
P.O. Box 608
201 South Beverly St.
Shoshone, ID 83352
Phone: 208.886.2406
Fax: 208.886.2407
E-mail: cfalen@uidaho.edu

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“"Our communities are safe, welcoming places where everyone is respected, all voices are heard and young adults want to raise their children... Visitors from far away are attracted by our recreation, cultural heritage tourism and renowned regional identity... our downtown is thriving and our entrepreneurial businesses cater to community residents." —portion of County Vision Statement"