



News Release

Embargoed to January 24, 2006

Sylvia Burgos Toftness
Northwest Area Foundation
651-225-7704

Jennie Dickinson
Dayton Chamber of Commerce
Dayton, WA
509-382-4825

Gynii Gilliam
Lemhi & North Custer Economic
Development Corporation
Salmon, ID
208-756-1505

Robert Schumacher
Illinois Valley Community Development Corporation
Illinois Valley, OR
541-592-4440

Diane Snyder
Wallowa Resources
Enterprise, OR
541-426-8053

FOUR SMALL, RURAL COMMUNITIES GET REWARDS FOR THEIR “GREAT STRIDES” TO REDUCE POVERTY LONG TERM

Northwest Area Foundation Recognizes Grit, Determination and Successes in Salmon, ID; Illinois Valley, OR; Enterprise, OR; and Dayton, WA

ST. PAUL, Minn. (January 24, 2006) – The Northwest Area Foundation today announced the four winners of its second annual “Great Strides Award,” an initiative created to recognize the steps communities have already taken to reduce poverty for the long term. Each winner will receive a \$100,000 award for their successes to date. Each community has also been offered a \$40,000 grant to facilitate its efforts to share lessons learned with other communities throughout the region.

The selected communities are: the Dayton Chamber of Commerce and Community Task Force Teams, Dayton, Washington; the Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCDO), Illinois Valley, Oregon; Wallowa Resources, Enterprise, Oregon; and Lemhi & North Custer Development Corporation, Salmon, Idaho. The \$100,000 awards – a reward for work already done – will go to community organizations, to be used for community benefit.

“Rural America faces tough economic challenges for a variety of reasons, including global competition, population declines, as well as state and federal policy trends,” Karl Stauber, president of Northwest Area Foundation. “While there are some who either ignore, or who have given up on this vast national asset, we are impressed and encouraged by the significant strides rural communities are taking to address poverty at its roots,” he said. “They drive home the lesson that when community members work together – when they form partnerships across public and private sectors, across departments and neighborhoods – they can reduce poverty and bring prosperity to all parts of their community, including those with the least resources,” said Stauber. “A key goal of the Northwest Area Foundation is to help communities examine and adapt these successful, sustainable strategies.”

Nearly 60 communities from the Northwest Area Foundation’s eight-state region (South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Idaho, Montana, Washington and Oregon) applied for the award. Six finalists hosted on-site visits by the Foundation, at which point the four winners were selected.

The winners were chosen because of the steps taken to date to implement poverty-reduction programs with five critical qualities:

- Inclusiveness: involvement of community members from diverse sectors and groups.

- Regional Impact: interaction with, and awareness of, other communities facing similar issues in their geographic area.
- Asset-Based Perspective: recognition of the community's existing strengths.
- Economic Engines: involvement with businesses and other organizations that fuel the local economy.
- Leadership: efforts to nurture leaders from different public and private sectors, ages and genders.

Dayton Chamber of Commerce and Community Task Force Teams, Dayton, Washington:

(Population 2,744, Columbia County poverty rate 12%). Town meetings, extensive community participation, building local assets, and innovative partnerships have been hallmarks of this community's long-lived effort. Over 20 years ago, about 10% of the population met to address the decaying downtown, a 20% unemployment rate and dwindling agricultural economy. By focusing on local business, nurturing entrepreneurs, restoring downtown to a historic district, maintaining affordable housing, job retention and creation, this community saw poverty fall by 34% between 1990 and 2000. Partnerships in this effort have included the Walla Walla Community College for workforce development, Puget Sound Energy which leased farmland in order to construct wind turbines, businesses that have fostered incubators and jobs to help offset loss of jobs due to the closing of a vegetable processing plant. Community benefits include: population increase, an increase in real estate values, 117 buildings on the historic registry, more medical professionals in town, a 50% increase in median income between 1989 and 1999. Other outcomes include increased leadership, continued community involvement, a growing arts community, a winery, and a bio-diesel project.

Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCDO), Illinois Valley, Oregon:

(Population 1,385, Josephine County poverty rate 15%). The Illinois Valley region includes unincorporated rural Josephine County including the city of Cave Junction. In 1974, the region developed an Economic Development Committee that gained Enterprise Community designation (1994-2004). Located in a formerly timber dependent community, the IVCDO has used funding opportunities from this designation to help create a highly successful micro-enterprise fund to assist low-income business owners, a business incubator facility for emerging businesses, a wildfire fuels reduction program, a new community center, a new women's shelter, support for a growing arts community, and mentoring and job training programs in cooperation with the local schools and community college. When the Enterprise Zone ended in 2004, the IVCDO, a non profit organization, developed a unique partnership with the National Park Service to manage the 70 year old, historic Oregon Caves Chateau. This project has created 40 seasonal and year-round jobs, uses local produce, food products and wine and sells local arts and crafts in the gift shop. The proceeds are poured back into the community to continue to address regional community needs. The IVCDO is developing the Friends of the Oregon Caves Chateau to begin restoration work on this National historic Landmark, and has received support from the Meyer Memorial Trust to develop a furniture restoration and manufacturing plan for the historic Monterey furniture. Collaborations include city and county governments, the chamber of commerce, local businesses, a regional environmental education program, the school district and neighboring university and community college.

Wallowa Resources, Enterprise, Oregon: (Population 1,795, Wallowa County poverty rate 12%).

Economic hardships resulting from the decline of the local timber industry in the 1990s has promoted innovative thinking and action in Enterprise. The community changed its focus to collaborative environmental management which includes sustainable use of community assets while creating living wage jobs. In Enterprise, a diverse set of stakeholders jointly plan for community-wide benefit. For example, highly-skilled geologists and forest professionals left unemployed by the timber industry down-turn are creating businesses and securing contracts to fill new economic opportunities. Nonprofit Wallowa Resources develops businesses that are spun off into for-profit enterprises. For example, a recent start-up, Post & Pole plant, markets small-diameter poles and bundled firewood. Landscape management has been integrated into the schools, and includes an Urban/Rural Ranch Camp which gives city and country kids an opportunity to build relationships while they experience the field. Revenues from Oregon State University's courses on land stewardship will soon flow to the community and fund other local school natural resource courses. Outcomes include increased employment opportunities for nearly 2% of the non-farm workforce, reduced controversy about public forest land management, improved resource condition on public and private lands, and, collaborations across governments, and between the business and private sector.

Lemhi & North Custer Development Corporation, Salmon and Challis, Idaho: (Population in the two county population in our service area is approximately 10,000, with a 1 person/sq mile density; poverty rate Lemhi County 13%, Custer County 12%). Salmon, Challis, and surrounding rural and remote communities leveraged their Idaho Commerce and Labor GEM designation to attract additional resources to build strong partnerships and develop a regional approach to problem solving. GEM-based training, vision and goal development, and focus on developing an economic engine has lead to a climate of innovative and sustainable development. This has included a medical-industry business incubation center, the NASA-partnered Challis Observatory, workforce development through distance learning, and Scenic Byway coordination on nearly 300 miles of highways in the region to improve the tourism industry. Successes include strong partnerships with the Eastern Idaho Technical College, the Idaho Economic Development Association, and many of the resource-based state and federal agencies in the region. Public private partnerships have created jobs, decreased unemployment, and increased per capita income in the last four years. Additionally, the increased services at the new Steele Memorial Hospital are contributing to decreasing economic leakage. The region is committed to building the local infrastructure to help attract business and individuals, as well as strengthening tourism to generate economic opportunities. Additional outcomes include increased earning capacity for LPN graduates from \$6 to \$12.50/hr, partnering with neighboring Challis, Stanley, and Leadore on economic development projects, and a new regional outdoor stage venue at the Challis Golf Course.

The Foundation has offered each of the remaining two candidates a \$25,000 grant to help them increase community participation in their existing poverty reduction initiatives. The two communities are: the Fort Peck Community College, Fort Peck Reservation, Montana; and the Grand Forks Housing Authority, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

The Northwest Area Foundation is dedicated to helping communities reduce poverty for the long term. It does this by identifying, sharing and advocating for practical strategies and tools developed or gathered from its programs, and from the work of other communities and organizations. The Foundation provides financial resources and technical assistance that help communities create a climate and build the capabilities to achieve: asset identification and development; expanded economic opportunities that create living-wage jobs; increased community skills for planning, teaching, leading and implementing poverty reduction initiatives; and decision making that incorporates the voice and vote of broad segments of the community, including those of people in poverty.

The Foundation works on strategic efforts with a small number of rural, urban, and American Indian reservation communities, and organizations supporting these efforts, in its eight-state region: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. These states were served by the Great Northern Railway, founded by James J. Hill. In 1934, Hill's son, Louis W. Hill established the foundation. The Foundation has approximately \$452.5 million in assets. For additional information, www.nwaf.org or call 651-224-9635.

-End-