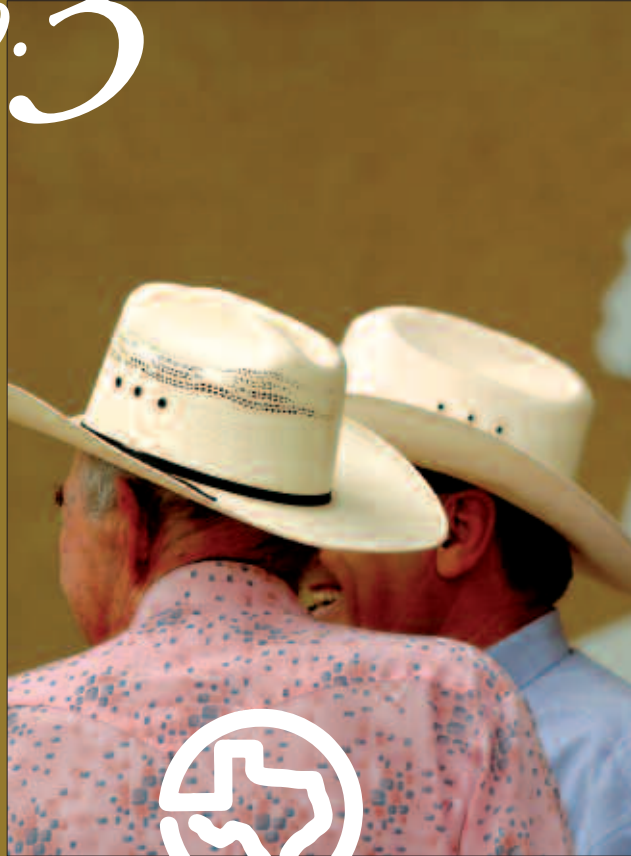


GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series

Issue No. 3

Building Community Buy-In

*Part three of a four-part
rural beautification
series produced by the
Texas Department of
Agriculture's GO TEXAN
Rural Beautification
Program to market,
promote and support
rural Texas.*



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TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER TODD STAPLES

“As rural Texas continues to grow, the preservation and celebration of our rural roots remains important. Every dollar spent on preservation, beautification, and new business development and tourism in rural Texas helps create jobs and generate income, adding to the state’s economy.



Together, we preserve the past, celebrate the present and anticipate the future of rural Texas.”

–*Todd Staples*

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Issue I Immediate Steps to Getting Headed in the Right Direction

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Issue III Building Community Buy-In

Issue IV Resources to Help Pave the Way

For details on other issues in the series, call (877) 99-GOTEX or visit www.gotexan.org.

Dear Rural Community Partner:

When we want to impress, we put our best face forward. First impressions can be lasting. For rural communities, the importance of making a good first impression can make the difference between visitors stopping to spend time and money or vehicles speeding by without a second look.

Though the term “beautification” may sound like a nice extra step communities can take after more vital community needs are addressed, it is one of the most critical activities communities can do to support economic development and success. Investing in beautification, rural preservation and community economic development programs grows jobs, tourism and business investments for the future of Texas.

Your participation in the Texas Department of Agriculture’s GO TEXAN Rural Community Program, a program created to promote and showcase rural Texas, gives you access to beautification and revitalization expertise and resources, as well as, a network of other hardworking rural communities.

We are pleased to offer you this resource as the third in a series of GO TEXAN beautification quick-start kits, each designed to build on one another and provide you with real tools and resources to help your community put its best face forward.

Interested in more information to help pave the way for your community? Give us a call at (877) 99-GOTEX, or visit us online at www.gotexan.org.

Best wishes for your beautification efforts!

Building Community Buy-In

Rural beautification should be a community-driven project in which all stakeholders have a voice.

The more involved community members are in both the short and long-term beautification projects and plans, the more invested they will be in the outcome and overall good of the community. All community members have value to add to the discussion as they are the people who live and work in the community. This issue of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series offers quick tips and strategies for beginning the process of building buy-in and opening the lines of communication.

How Do We Build Buy-In?

By Mary Alice Torres-MacDonald, Associate Professor, Community Design Laboratory College of Architecture, Texas Tech University

Building community support is critical for success. Support requires an investment — in patience, persistence and communication. Including the community in the process improves understanding of the final result. Consider the following guidelines.

Include ALL citizens.

Community support is developed by involving all members of the community. This requires the city to look broadly at how the community is represented and make every effort to include input from ALL citizens. Schools and churches are often better places to connect with the community than public meetings and workshops. Be open to thinking outside the box to gather more viewpoints.

Define problems to be solved.

It is impossible to solve a problem without identifying it first. Separate

“The seeds of our success are leadership and hard work. This might sound like a cliché, but we have individuals who will take time from their careers to work with us to see a project through.”

*Mike Hatley, Vice President
Midland Development Corporation*



perceived problems from actual problems. Perceived problems may need addressing through careful public education and awareness.

Implement large and small group discussions.

Bring together large and small groups for informal discussions about the future of the community. This can be done through church groups, local organizations, clubs, school PTAs or even specifically formed and representative community development groups.

Begin the process early.

Now is the perfect time to begin. Collect a sampling of concerns and problems along with ideas and opportunities. Change is constant; the process is ongoing.



SPOTLIGHT
on
SUCCESS

G I D D I N G S

Community involvement and continuous communication are two keys to beautification success in Giddings. Hometown hospitality is marked by the "open embrace" design of new signs welcoming visitors to the pioneer town of 6,000. Designed by a local sign business, constructed of "Native Giddings Stone" created specifically for the project by a local concrete manufacturer, and partially funded by a GO TEXAN beautification matching grant, the welcoming signs are built on a strong foundation of community buy-in. The city, chamber and economic development corporation collaborated on a comprehensive revitalization plan, spearheading beautification projects resulting from years of planning and development involving local businesses, landowners and residents. Continuing progress reports were shared with the community through town meetings, local news coverage, news letters and website updates. Building on this successful community partnering, Giddings also now hosts the Rural Texas Tourism Center in a restored 1800s Union Pacific Depot — a "one-stop shop" for rural Texas communities to combine resources and maximize the return on tourism marketing. Targeting families, group travel planners and tour bus operators, the center spotlights participating rural communities on the premises, on its website and at events throughout the year. Visit www.ruraltexas tourism.org for more information.

Create a vehicle for "seeing" ideas.

A picture really is worth a thousand words. It is often difficult to "see the idea" when described with words. Visual presentations (architectural renderings, computer graphics and photographs) allow for more productive feedback, buy-in and ownership. Architects, urban designers and landscape professionals, as well as many university architecture programs, such as the community design laboratory at Texas Tech University, can assist in these areas.

Build a process for review and revision that includes the community.

Include citizen feedback in the design and revision process. The investment in time is returned tenfold with community consensus and public ownership.

Be willing, as a political entity, to compromise.

Just as citizens must compromise their ideas at times, so must city government. Be willing to restructure projects that can yield stronger community support. The result is an expression of commitment and support to the community that improves support for local government.

Listen.

Be willing to listen to all ideas. Some may not be realistic, but often imbedded in the idea is a smaller idea that will create a greater impact.

Communicate.

Communication is essential; it involves the act of speaking as well as listening. Design feedback opportunities into every step of your process. Communicate quickly, frequently, repetitively and through multiple channels (in person, in writing and electronically). Do not e-mail important information that can trigger an emotional response. Misinterpretation can foster negative feelings about a process that should be inclusive and positive.

Implement.

Take action. Once the input is sifted, the ideas are developed and a plan is shaped. Make that plan a reality by implementing it. Do not sit around and wait for the time to be right and the stars to be in perfect alignment. Community support will be lost without action.

10 Quick Ways to Open the Lines of Communication

1. Open community forums for dialogue
2. Organize small community projects
3. Implement coffee talks
4. Organize “Big Talks”
5. Exhibit ideas
6. Create short lectures
7. Conduct workshops
8. Solicit feedback through local organizations
9. Update citizens through various mediums
10. Promote local successes



Recommended Reading

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities

USDA Rural Development, Office of Community Development
www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/about/strategic.pdf

National Trust for Historic Preservation

2009 catalog of preservation books
www.preservationbooks.org

Planning Handbook for Rural Texas Communities

Lower Colorado River Authority
www.lcra.org/community/planning.html

Texas Historical Commission Publications/Guidelines

Finding and Hiring Qualified Historic Preservation Consultants
Guidelines for Historical Research
Official Texas Historical Markers
Remembering Texas
Texas Preservation Guidelines
www.thc.state.tx.us

Put the Power of Texas Behind Your Rural Community!

The GO TEXAN Rural Community Program is an initiative launched by the Texas Department of Agriculture to help market and promote rural Texas. A broad-based program, the GO TEXAN Rural Community Program creates a single rallying call for rural Texas, educating the public about all that rural Texas has to offer, and encourages rural communities to share and promote successful ideas. There is no cost to join.

Member benefits for rural communities include the following:

Grant fund opportunities for certified communities

- ☛ GO TEXAN Rural Community Hometown STARS Program
- ☛ GO TEXAN Rural Community Bootstrap Bucks Program

Marketing

- ☛ Statewide promotional campaigns
- ☛ Online events calendar
- ☛ Online rural destination guide
- ☛ Use of the GO TEXAN Rural Community mark

Information

- ☛ Marketing and rural tourism workshops hosted across the state
- ☛ Guidebooks on event planning, downtown beautification and more
- ☛ Quarterly infoletters with action-oriented information
- ☛ E-mail alerts for the latest news and dates

Networking

- ☛ Contacts and programs at other state and federal agencies
- ☛ Online partner database
- ☛ Secrets to small town successes from other GO TEXAN Rural Communities

Recognition

- ☛ Hardworking Rural Community Awards
- ☛ Statewide GO TEXAN Rural Community Program media coverage
- ☛ And more!

For all the details on the GO TEXAN Rural Community Program, call (877) 99-GOTEX or visit www.gotexan.org.

With residents' support and input, a community is well on its way to rallying the support it needs to take its beautification efforts to new levels. Community buy-in is also a powerful tool to leverage other resources, which include numerous state and federal programs designed to support communities' revitalization and beautification efforts. Issue IV of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Series provides a list of these resources.



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