

## **2001 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Empower Lewiston Enterprise Community**

The Lewiston (Maine) Enterprise Community is rather small (0.9 square miles, 6000 population in 1990) compared to many of the USDA Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. However, it has: a big Strategic Plan (total budget is currently \$77 million), a large number of interested and helpful partners(30+) and projects (40+), and an obvious need for the program (poverty rates in the EC were 47% and 34% in the two EC census tracts, from the 1990 census). In the big picture, Lewiston began declining in the 1960's from a vibrant community with many manufacturing jobs to one that lost its economic base to southern and foreign competitors. From one mill alone, 5,000 jobs were lost. The city's 1990 census population of about 40,000 stood roughly where it was 100 years ago; it continued to lose population in the 90's. Clearly, something needed to be done. After enormous local efforts, USDA approved the Plan, and two downtown census tracts were designated as an Enterprise Community in December, 1998. Empower Lewiston (EL), a 501(c)(3) separate from the city, was established to oversee implementation of the Plan and administer federal and other funds for the Plan. Some achievements by our partners and EL to date are: 492 new jobs, 692 retained jobs (BMK 3 and 33); 238 clients served, 1,244 services/referrals, and 77 programs in the WERC First area (BMK 1); 30+ partners and donors; 40+ projects; five EL scholarships/financial assistance to low-income residents for training; eight additional residents (non-board) participated in 2000 project ratings/funding decisions, and the WERC First and Faithworks (BMK 3) projects won the 2001 Androscoggin Chamber of Commerce's Business/Education Award. But on to the specific areas of the annual USDA report.

**1. MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** Three of our most significant accomplishments during 2001 are funding for the Neighborhood Center (BMK 6) and the lead-based paint program (BMK 10), and the award of funds for 13 projects.

**NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER (BMK 6):** The Neighborhood Center essentially obtained full funding during 2001. This benchmark is led by the Lewiston Housing Authority (LHA) and its goal is to create an accessible, user-friendly, centrally-located facility in the EC. There, low-income residents can access a variety of services, such as those provided by a medical and dental Family Health Center, Head Start/Day Care, and adult education. In addition, the Center will provide areas for non-profit agencies to share office space, resources and client services. Obtaining full-funding is remarkable because of the budget size (\$2.5 million) and because this project has changed substantially from its original state. The 1998 strategic plan called for two facilities, a projected cost of \$190,000, and rehabilitating existing buildings and leasing them with an option to buy. A variety of factors resulted in the present plan for a new 20,000 square foot building, at an estimated cost of \$2.5 million. At the beginning of 2001, approximately \$200,000 had been obtained or pledged; we now have \$2.5 million. The expectation is that ground will be broken in the fall of 2002, and occupancy and helpful programs will begin in the summer of 2003.

**LEAD-BASED PAINT PROGRAM ( BMK 10):** The Strategic Plan's lead-based paint program, led by the City of Lewiston, obtained \$1,215,000 in US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development funds in 2001. The grant will fund a variety of activities that will reduce the EC residents' (especially children's) exposure to lead paint (blood testing for children living in low-income housing, removal of lead-based paint hazards from privately owned low-income homes and apartments, inspection and testing of low-income housing for the presence of lead hazards, etc.). This project is particularly important since a major goal of the EC is to break the cycle of poverty; the connections are: poverty levels, housing stock age, blood lead levels, learning disabilities and income. In the EC, 94% of the units in census tract 201, and 71% in census tract 204, were built prior to 1950 (homes built prior to 1950 are especially likely to

contain lead paint, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). In the Lewiston/Auburn area, only about 15% of the children have been tested, and about 15% of those children have lead levels above 10 ug/dl. Lead poisoning in children can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, mental retardation, and at extremely high levels, seizures, coma and even death. A recent study concluded that even children with a blood lead level below 10 ug/dL scored an average of 11.1 points lower on the Stanford- Binet IQ test (vs. those with a level of 1 ug/dL or less). Another recent study reports that Chelator, the primary treatment for lead exposure, can reduce children's blood lead levels, but it does not appear to protect their learning abilities from harm. The reality is that with this project, children will have reduced exposure to lead, and this in turn will help increase their learning and income-producing abilities.

**NEW PROJECTS:** In 2001 EL pledged/distributed \$188,200 in funding to 13 projects. In the general housing area, EL helped fund projects for: Employer-assisted Housing (Coastal Enterprises, Inc.), Affordable Housing (Sisters of Charity Health Systems), Lots to Gardens (Sisters of Charity) and a Housing Survey (City of Lewiston/contractor). In addition, two local neighborhood associations were begun (UnitedKingfield Bank and Richardson Hollow Mental Health Services). In the general area of outreach, resources and participation, EL provided funding for three new and two continuing projects: WERC First Resources Coordinator (Lewiston Adult Education), Seeds of Change Outreach Workers (United Way), a Mothers' Program (Hope House), a Resources Directory and Database (Seniors Plus); and Downtown Programs (Downtown Neighborhood Assn.). The youth area saw three new projects begun with EL funding in 2001, all under BMK 34: a Juvenile Intervention Program (Volunteers of America), a Pizza Clinic for sex education (Tri-county Health Services), and a Youth Mentoring Project (Child Health Center). EL provided \$20,000 of the 2000 \$42,000 grant to Museum L-A for the Visitor Center/Heritage Museum.

**2. LEVEL OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:** A major effort in 2001 was a "Community Discussion" held in October. This was an opportunity to provide information on a year's worth of Strategic Plan activity to the community, and through remarks and a survey, to obtain input from the community on what was important to them. About 45 people attended, twice the attendance of the 2000 meeting. There were on-site child care, refreshments and raffle prizes. Publicity efforts included ads and stories in the daily paper and the free bi-weekly paper, and notices on the local access cable station, radio, the weekly report and flyers. Comments on the meeting indicated most felt the sessions were very informative and helpful, and, in regard to efforts and results, encouraging. We formatted the USDA-required weekly report to include a section discussing activity relating to the strategies and developing related projects, a section with information about the board and committee meetings, and a section on Exec. Dir. activities. The report, which has headers in capital letters to make it easier to locate or skip items, is now distributed to more than 100 local contacts, generally through e-mail. EL writes and provides press releases to local media; the 40 or so stories in 2001 were about twice as many as last year. We purchased ads in both of the papers to provide notice about the Oct. community meeting and our booth at the regional Business to Business Trade Show, gave information to the local access cable station, and developed and posted/distributed flyers throughout the EC. Staff makes presentations before various groups, and she and board members also engage in many discussions at a variety of locations.

**3. PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES:** Ongoing relationships between some benchmark leads and the organization (both staff and board) have improved. Funding efforts certainly made this the case with the Neighborhood Center and the lead-based paint project; it extends to other existing projects. Most benchmark leads participate in benchmark reviews; they are viewed as essential to that process. Staff contact benchmark leads as needed and/or appropriate. Empower Lewiston generates a quarterly report from the USDA benchmark system and provides the results to the board and all benchmark leads. Many benchmark leads attend board and committee meetings. New partners brought in with the 2001-

funded projects. Some of the new partners/new projects this year are: Seniors Plus (development of a resources directory/database); Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (employer-assisted housing), and Volunteers of America (juvenile intervention program). Several potential partners contacted staff to discuss possible projects. For the end of 2001, EL is pleased to report the following figures: about \$77 million total budget, about \$70 million requested, and about \$26 million received. The sources and amounts of the funds received are: \$378K of EL/EC funding; \$3.8 million from US HUD; \$350K from US DOT; \$1.4 million from USDA/Rural Development; \$460K from state government; \$12.1 million from local and regional government; \$5.7 million from the private sector; \$1.7 million from nonprofits; and \$33K from other sources. This means every EL/EC dollar was leveraging 68 dollars from other sources.

**4. PROBLEMS/OBSTACLES:** The previously known and ongoing problems are securing enough funding, progress and community input. Three “new” problems were not anticipated at the time of the plan’s development: the extent of the effort needed to increase low-income residents’ participation; legal issues associated with space in a building that is to be used for a benchmark project; and the occasional need for major revisions to strategies’ scope and/or benchmark leads.

**5. SOLUTIONS:** Participation by low-income residents has been an on-going concern; a considerable amount of thought and effort has gone into attempting to increase participation. We held our Oct. Community meeting twice (mid-day and early evening) so those with shift work or other scheduling concerns had two opportunities; provided on-site child care; held it at the local Multi-Purpose Center, a familiar site for the residents; had incentives (free food and drinks, and raffle prizes); and did extensive publicity work (papers, TV and radio spots, flyer postings and handouts, the weekly report and street and other conversations). While 45 attended, they included only one resident not previously known to the organization. In 2002, residents on the board will attempt to host small, local “coffees” in their homes, hoping they will put residents at ease and result in the gradual increase of resident involvement. Also, EC residents who are on the board will meet with each other to draw on their own experiences and motivations to determine how they can best bring in their peers. The problem involving legal issues is expected to play itself out in time, and the obstacles regarding major changes in benchmarks’ lead or scope are addressed as EL and partners are able (solutions are currently emerging for the two previously mentioned projects). EL would be interested in technical assistance regarding specific case studies of projects that were successful in addressing the issues associated with poverty while also generating an income stream for the community/organization.

**6. BEST PRACTICES:** A wonderful method to keep benchmark leads interested and concerned about their projects’ progress has arisen from our committee structure and the quarterly benchmark and weekly reports. All strategies are assigned to one of our five Committees, and they have responsibility for overseeing their implementation. Thus, Committee chairs and members, as well as benchmark leads, are aware of activities. In addition, widely distributing a quarterly benchmark report and the weekly report helps keep the leads engaged with their strategies.

**7. PLANS/PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE:** We intend to implement the Strategic Plan fully by the end of our EC designation. We will pursue funding from non-governmental sources, and hope to obtain some training and or technical assistance on methods of generating income