



INTRODUCTION

By Don E. Albrecht
Director, Western Rural Development Center

We are very excited to present to you this issue of *Rural Connections*. As always, our goal is to share programs, insights, and information of exceptional research and outreach efforts to help our partners address significant issues confronting the individuals and communities of the rural West. The first article in this issue, by Emilia Istrate of the National Association of Counties, shows that the extent to which counties have recovered from the recent economic recession varies widely. Of small western counties, 72 of 373 had not recovered on any of four indicators by 2014. Obviously, programs to enhance economic development are needed. Counties are also struggling with troubling environmental issues. We hope that the articles in this issue provide valuable information to help address both economic and environmental concerns.

Several articles in this issue describe programs to help communities address economic development concerns. Autumn Ellison and her colleagues from the University of Oregon and Oregon State University describe how a variety of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have helped forest communities confront issues resulting from reduced timber harvests. My colleague Marion Bentley (USU Extension) and I describe the implementation of the Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) in a small county in Utah. This is a program that has been successfully utilized in communities throughout the West. Lori Cramer from Oregon State University reminds us that every community must be prepared for disasters and she shares study results of a tsunami event specifically assessing organizations working with socially vulnerable populations. Additionally, Andrea Rossman describes efforts to increase travelers' desires to follow "America's Loneliest Highway"

along the Pony Express route and Highway 50 across Nevada. Personally, I can't wait to make the drive.

Other articles in this issue describe programs and efforts to help communities address environmental concerns. Terry Bruner, USDA Rural Development State Director in New Mexico, has written two articles. The first describes how volunteers assist in water delivery in a small New Mexico community, while the second examines the potential in fixing up vacant homes in a rural community that has experienced significant outmigration. Peter Barcinas describes efforts to attain sustainability in Guam. Sara Delheimer examines how crowdsourcing provides tremendous advantages in obtaining more complete weather and climate data. Ashley Hawn tells readers about a multistate research project to help improve the efficiency of and increase utilization of microirrigation techniques that improve water use efficiency. Finally, from outside of the western region, Kathleen Liang of the University of Vermont explores the potential of creative approaches to farming for economic mobility and rural development.

We appreciate that excellent work of persons involved in rural development work in the West and we look forward to hearing from more of you in future issues. As always, I appreciate the extensive talents of my colleague *Rural Connections* editor, Betsy Newman. •