

Why HCCDC? A Historical Perspective

By Frank A. Schersing

What's the story behind the Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation? HCCDC formed on December 8, 2000 and was designated by the Internal Revenue Service on August 13, 2001 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. The Corporations Nonprofit Articles of Incorporation were recognized by the Secretary of State on December 15, 2000.

Back then the economic situation in Thurston County and the Winnebago Reservation did not look very promising to raise a family. Poverty rates were almost six times as high on the Winnebago Reservation compared to the national level, according to the 1998 U.S. Census.

Poverty Rate		
	Number	Percent
Winnebago Reservation	893	72.5%
Thurston County	1,796	25.3%
Nebraska		%
United States	34,475,762	12.7%

Data are U.S. Census interdecennial data from 1998 for Thurston County and the U.S. and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development Nebraska Databook, whose data is compiled using U.S. Census numbers (1998 figures are used).

2001 Unemployment Rate Annual Average		
	Percent	
Winnebago Reservation	24.7%	Nebraska Department of Labor
Winnebago Reservation	60.2%	BIA Indian Labor Force Report
Thurston County	7.5%	Nebraska Department of Labor
United States	4.8%	Nebraska Department of Labor

In addition to the poverty issues, the rate of death per 1,000 people was unusually high in Thurston County compared to the rest of the State of Nebraska. The Suicide rate was twice the state's average, Diabetes-related deaths were three times the state average, and Homicide's were five times the state average. Thurston County was not the place to be in Nebraska. The area needed to be developed, people needed to be given hope.

HCCDC's mission is to raise the socio-economic and educational levels on the Winnebago Reservation and help the people in Thurston County. Its emphasis is to create an economically viable community by improving the unemployment rates, poverty levels, expanding training opportunities, developing enterprises in depressed areas, and expanding housing opportunities for low-income persons and families. In order to further its mission, four primary areas of focus were established including commercial development, business/technology training, community betterment and youth programs, and housing development.

HCCDC has increased from a budget of about \$50,000 at its inception to a multi-million dollar budget this year, fluctuating a little based on the projects that are undertaken. Last year 21 people worked for HCCDC, while normally there are



between 9 and 11 regular employees each year, it is dependent upon the grants we receive. In addition to providing employment for the Winnebago Community, our organization also developed areas around the community.

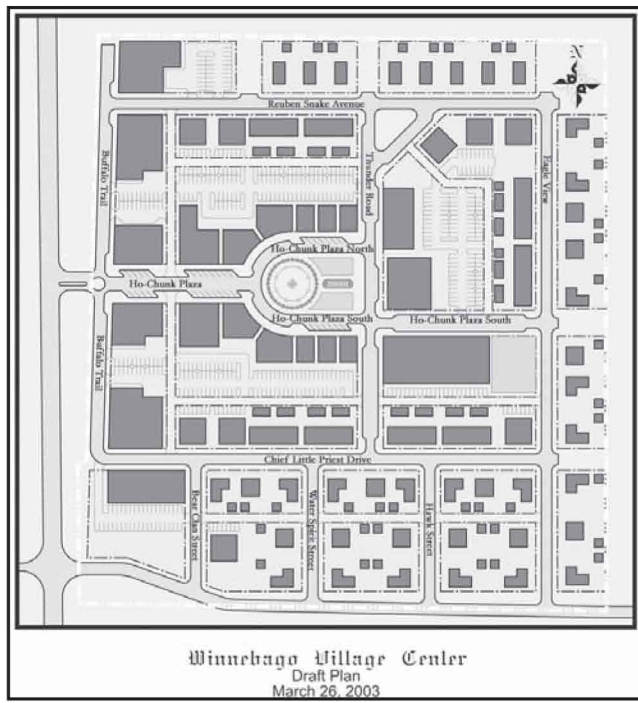
In 2001, HCCDC started writing grants to help develop the community; the first \$120,000 grant came in to purchase the 40 acres that the Ho-Chunk Village sits on. \$490,000 was awarded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for construction of a technology center, \$200,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Rural Development and \$100,000 from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development as well as state and private funds of over \$50,000.

By 2002 funds for projects started coming in. \$493,000 was awarded from three separate funding sources to develop a business incubator and establish a micro-loan program for small businesses in Thurston County. \$800,000 came in from an Indian Community Development Building Grant (ICDBG) that had a 41% leverage to develop some infrastructure for the Ho-Chunk Village that included water, sewers, and streets. \$230,000 came in, \$200,000 from the Shakopee Tribe and \$30,000 from the Smoking Joe Corporation, for down payment assistance for new home owners in the Ho-Chunk Village single-family homes.

In 2003, HCCDC received \$3,166,000, from three separate grants, to construct the All-Native Commercial Building, and the Village Place, a mini-mall/apartment building in the Ho-Chunk Village. This also offered employment opportunities for individuals in the Winnebago area, as well as opportunities for small businesses. During the year another \$329,770 grant was received to fund the Native American Sculpture Garden reminding people of the Ho-Chunk village life and culture. In May of 2003 HCCDC opened its doors at their current location in Walthill, and in June they broke ground for the Ho-Chunk Village.

In 2004, HCCDC utilized four grants and matching in-kind services to get \$2,473,734 to construct the Woodland Trails Art Retail and Learning Center. This was an opportunity to reach out to the local artists and give them an opportunity for income and a way to pass along the tradition and culture to younger artists in the area. There was also another \$360,000 that was in a single-family construction fund to build homes in the Village.

In 2005, HCCDC was the recipient of a \$200,000 grant from the US Department of Agriculture for loans to help small businesses. This was for Entrepreneurs interested in starting their own businesses that would also provide more employment opportunities. HCCDC received \$15,000 from the Nebraska Forest Service was used for landscaping in the Village. There was also \$261,365 to build a walking trail from Winnebago to the Ho-Chunk Village. This came from the Nebraska Department of Roads (\$213,845), Nebraska Resource District (\$23,760), and \$23,760 in local match. During this year, HCCDC also brought together \$900,000 from an



ICDBG, \$250,000 from the Shakopee Tribe, and \$108,000 from the Winnebago Tribe to make the \$1,258,000 necessary to enclose the Winnebago Public Pool.

In 2006, HCCDC received a \$12,770 grant from the Nebraska Division of Travel and Tourism to promote the Woodland Trails Art Retail and Learning Center in the Ho-Chunk Village, a \$25,000 grant from the Cooper Foundation for programming at Woodland Trails, and \$23,206 from the Department of Justice to fund youth art classes at Woodland Trails. There was also a \$900,000 grant from a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) build-

ing grant to renovate and refurbish 15 deteriorated public housing units for low-income families and to do more planning for the tribe.

In 2007, HCCDC raised \$3,229,725 in cooperation with the Village of Winnebago Housing Authority to construct the 20 unit low-income Little Priest Apartments. This was done through grants, the Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and investor capital. This project was completed this year and now 20 families have a new home.

In 2008, HCCDC received \$680,705 from the Health and Human Services Department, Community Economic Development, for a five year project to train construction workers in the community and build a distribution and training facility. This is an active project that will hold its first classes next month.

These were the major building programs that HCCDC was involved with since the doors were opened at the end of 2000. There were other things that HCCDC was involved in for the community besides buildings. The award winning Winnebago Community Development Fund that was run by HCCDC until recently has helped fund over \$3 million in Winnebago Projects and is a critical link to a successful community. The fund can be used to provide matching funds for some of the community or tribal grant applications. Some of the programs that used Winnebago Community Development Fund Dollars in the past were: Ho-Chunk Village Partners Infrastructure, Ho-Chunk Renaissance CHARP Project, Tribe/Community Wake and Burial Building, Tribal Youth Development Center, Winnebago Clan Sculptures Project, Liberal Arts Building Project, Walking Trail Project, Skate Park, Community Clean-Up Project, Volunteer Fire Department Grass Rig Vehicle, Fire Hall/ Old Courthouse Renovations, Ho-Chunk Youth News, Tribal Historical Society, Thunder Way Trail, Swimming Pool Enclosure Project and the Native Plants Landscaping Projects. HCCDC was and still is involved with the Active Living by Design Program, which has a major impact on making the community a healthier place to live by adding walking trails around the community and educating members on healthy life-style choices to help control diabetes on the Reservation. There was also a Rural Community Development Initiative that HCCDC became involved in to help increase the technology within the community that brought over \$152,000 into the community. The Active Living and technology grants worked with the youth in the Community to develop their writing and computer skills. There was also early interest in exploring the possibilities of setting up a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) within Winnebago. These CDFI planning grants brought additional funds to the community, but it was decided at that time not to follow through with the idea. A couple other prominent programs in the community that HCCDC has been involved with are the Learn and Serve Program, Meth Initiative, and Weed and Seed. These are on-going programs that were briefly talked about in the previous issue.

According to the BIA 2003 Labor Report, the unemployment rate for the Winnebago Reservation was 53%. By 2005 (the most recent report available), it had dropped to 39.6%. HCCDC (through the addition of new departments, programs, and projects) and HCI (through the addition of new subsidiary companies), contributed to this decrease through job creation made possible by the joint effort of both organizations.

Poverty Rate		
	Number	Percent
Winnebago Reservation	731	28.3%
Thurston County	329	19.3%
Nebraska	161,2697	9.7%
United States	281,421,906	12.4%

Thurston County, Nebraska and the U.S. data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary Files; Winnebago Reservation data are from the Bureau of Indian Affairs 2003 Labor Market Information Report.

According to the Nebraska Department of Labor, unemployment for Native Americans within Thurston County in 2004 was over five times greater than the national rate. On a local level, unemployment among tribal members on the reservation was six times greater than the county unemployment rate.

Unemployment Rate		
	Unemployed	Percent
Winnebago Reservation	459	51.6%
Thurston County	617	8.6%
Native Americans in Thurston County	221	23.8%
Nebraska	27,537	3.0%
United States	5,655,000	4.5%

Thurston County, Nebraska and the U.S. data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File; Winnebago Reservation data are from the Bureau of Indian Affairs 2003 Labor Market Information Report.

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Until the past few years loans for housing were unattainable on reservations. Lenders used the excuse that they would not loan money for homes located on trust land because they were afraid of the tribal court system. Realistically, the lenders did not want to take the time to learn the process to complete the loan. Slowly this is beginning to change. The Section 184 program was designed to improve access to capital for Native Americans and provide private funding opportunities for tribal housing agencies. The majority of families on reservations do not own their own home and neither did their parents or grandparents, which is the single largest investment a family can have in America. Approximately 80% of housing in Winnebago is rental for low-income. Those who begin to improve their financial situation by increasing household income are forced to look outside of the local community because of the lack of supply of middle income housing. With no non HUD-owned housing available for sale or rent, these families are forced to move to other surrounding communities. The result is that more low-income than middle-income families reside in Winnebago today. The town itself then offers little in the way of incentive for anyone to start a business when peoples' finances are so limited and income requirements serve as a disincentive to improve financially.

The Community Strategic Plan includes four economic, social, and governance goals, with benchmarks, objectives and strategies. The four goals are: (1) Establish the basic infrastructure to stimulate economic development, enable housing growth, and improve the quality of life on the reservation; (2) Develop meaningful economic development projects that will stimulate individual entrepreneurship, facilitate Tribal development, utilize existing funding from federal, state, and Tribal programs, take advantage of the Tribe's unique legal status, and provide the means for true Tribal economic self-sufficiency; (3) Develop all forms of housing, including: single family, multifamily, assisted living, and an elderly care facility; and (4) Improve the quality of life including: promoting all levels of education, upgrading medical facilities, developing youth services, and improving the judicial system.

A lot of the successes and accomplishments in the programs talked about earlier happened with the coordination, collaboration, and participation of other organizations within the community. Our organization has worked with: Tribal and BIA Law Enforcement, IHS and Tribal Health with the Health Educator, Schools in the Community, Village and Tribal Housing, Child and Family Services, Human Services, Senior Center, the Tribal Council, and HCI and its subsidiaries. Without the cooperation and help of these organizations and probably some others that I am not aware of HCCDC would not be the success it is today. Thank you. HCCDC has been working toward the Community Plan with the things that were done in the past. In the next issue find out where HCCDC is going in the next few years.