



Heritage-Based Economic Development to be Focus of Grant for Helena-West Helena

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HELENA, AR (October 11, 2005) Just weeks after the launch of the Phillips County Strategic Community Plan, Helena-West Helena has received a powerful boost in the implementation of a major component of the plan, heritage-based tourism and economic development.

In an announcement released September 19, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the Arkansas Delta as one of two regions selected to pilot its Rural Heritage Development Initiative, a three-year demonstration project to help rural communities utilize historical and cultural assets to achieve economic gain. The Arkansas Delta and the Heartland region of Central Kentucky were selected from a field of eleven applicants to participate in the program.

The initiative will focus on the potential of authentic historical and cultural assets to drive tourism, entrepreneurship, and business development. Heritage-based assets may include such community resources as historical structures and sites, traditional products and human skills. Helena-West Helena is one of five Main Street communities in the Arkansas Delta to participate in the project. Other communities include Blytheville, Osceola, West Memphis and Dumas. (Main Street Arkansas is a program of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.)

The Heritage Rural Development Initiative is funded in part by a \$750,000, three-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The National Trust will provide \$360,000 in technical

assistance services with regional participants providing another \$180,000 each in matching funds. Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation is funding the Delta match.

Lead applicant for the grant is Arkansas Delta Byways (ADP), a non-profit regional tourism promotion association serving 15 counties in eastern Arkansas. ADP will partner with Main Street Arkansas; the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas, a statewide, non-profit historic preservation organization; and the five participating Arkansas Delta Main Street Communities. A full-time professional staff person will be based in Helena at the Delta Cultural Center.

“This truly is wonderful news for Helena-West Helena and Phillips County,” states Paul Oliver, local business owner and Executive Director of Main Street Helena. “We have always known our community was rich in historical and cultural assets. Lewis and Clark, the Civil War, the blues, we’re a national treasure. The Rural Heritage Development Initiative will help us preserve, develop and market these extraordinary resources.”

Cathy Cunningham, Community Development Coordinator for Southern Financial Partners (the Helena-based non-profit lending and community development affiliate of Southern Bancorp) and a long-time historic preservationist, agrees. “Most people understand the economic opportunity that tourism presents,” states Cunningham. “But heritage-based development does more than draw in much needed tourist dollars. It also enhances a community’s quality of life and encourages people to live and work in the area. This can make a very big difference for Helena-West Helena and Phillips County as a whole.”

Assessment visits by professional staff of the National Trust will begin this month.

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