



## PRESS RELEASE

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**COMMUNITY PROGRESS INITIATIVE SERVES AS CONTEMPORARY MODEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
*Judith L. Millesen, Ohio University, Publishes Case Study*

**WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WI (May 5, 2008)** --- *Community Economic Development at Its Finest: A Case Study of the Community Progress Initiative*, by associate professor of political science, Judith L. Millesen, Ohio University, examines the Community Progress Initiative as a strategy for economic development. Drawing on data collected over a seven month period, Millesen presents a comprehensive case study of the Community Progress Initiative, a joint partnership between the Heart of Wisconsin Business and Economic Alliance and the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County. The study concludes that the Community Progress Initiative serves as an exemplar of contemporary community economic development practices in that it has been a proactive, holistic approach to community change that focuses on citizen engagement, developing local assets, capturing opportunities, and achieving economic resilience.

The case study reviews how the Community Progress Initiative (CPI) recognizes the importance of community participation and community development in achieving long-term sustainable economic results. Historically, economic development strategies have largely focused on attracting outside investment and industry into the community (a hunting & gathering—business relocation strategy). The Community Progress Initiative utilizes the community's social infrastructure and offers what is needed to empower individuals and groups by providing them with skills and resources to effect change in their communities, an economic development approach known as "gardening" that promotes growth from individuals and resources within one's own region.

Millesen's study summarizes how the CPI programs create a business-friendly culture that encourages expansion of existing businesses, provides technical support to new start-up businesses, and links owners to investment capital. CPI organizers knew from the start if local entrepreneurs were to invest in themselves, their ideas, and their businesses they would need well-integrated support and services to make this new economy work.

The case study examines how CPI includes both programmatic and nonprogrammatic elements to build economic development. Programmatic elements include: industry clusters, technical assistance, and entrepreneurial support. Nonprogrammatic elements include: citizen engagement, philanthropic support and leadership training.

Millesen concludes that the Community Progress Initiative is a model of institutional collaboration and community capacity building that has restored a sense of local control among citizens in the Greater South Wood County region. She contends that CPI is a contemporary community economic development that has explicitly recognized the social and political aspects of community life that have influenced the economic situation in the Greater South Wood County region and empowered community residents to express their preferences, devise strategies, and mobilize the resources needed to "create the kind of communities they want to live in."

Professor Millesen is also the published author of *"Economic Devastation Renewal, and Growth: Community Foundations Catalysts for Change."* This research examines how the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County, in partnership with Heart of Wisconsin Business &

Economic Alliance, coordinated an effort to transform community culture. As public institutions with a long-term commitment to specific geographic areas, community foundations are uniquely positioned to lead strategic community-based efforts, engage citizens in philanthropy, and develop a thorough understanding of community needs, assets and capacity. Professor Millesen's research details how community foundations – during times of economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, dwindling resources, and complex societal needs – can play a key role in building community stability and empowerment, functioning as a change agent that helps citizens advance and create new visions for local communities. The two case studies are available to read on the Community Progress Initiative website: (<http://progressinitiative.com/>).

Judith L. Millesen will be presenting an overview of the published case study, *Community Economic Development at Its Finest: A Case Study of the Community Progress Initiative* at the Inner Wisconsin Inspires Innovation economic development luncheon May 21 (11:15 am-1:00 pm), Hotel Mead. The cost of the luncheon is \$15. The registration form is available at: (<http://progressinitiative.com/>). This is an equal opportunity program.

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Community Progress Initiative is supported with partial financing from: Barker Mead Fund of Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County; United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development; Wisconsin Department of Commerce and Community Development Block Grant funds; NewPage, Ocean Spray, and The Ford Foundation.