



Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission

Helping people. Changing lives.

change



Feature Story

EOC's Regional Rural Microenterprise Support System

Turning Passion into Profit

Quarterly Newsletter
volume 5

EOC is an integral catalyst of positive change in our community. We are helping people and changing lives through various events and services.

EOC continues to explore new ways to inspire change and make our community a better place. In just the past few months EOC has been responsible for instituting real change.

in this issue

Turning Passion into Profit

A pilot microenterprise program is producing new business owners in rural communities and is setting the stage for similar programs nationwide.

On the Move

Taking children to school, the elderly to a doctor's appointment, or helping disabled residents get around town; Fresno County EOC's Transit Systems provides safe, reliable transportation countywide to thousands of our residents.

Paving a Path to Success

Students in the Careers and Leadership class at School of Unlimited Learning lived a lesson in working in the real world. Internships in various professional fields provided these students the hands-on experience needed to thrive.





from the executive director

There is no denying it ... our economy is in a decline. With increasing food and gas prices and double-digit unemployment rates in the Valley, and nationwide, economists believe we are entering a recession; others argue we are already in one.

This difficult economic climate has made it even harder for already struggling Fresno County individuals and families to become, and remain, economically self-sufficient. Noting that the declining economy is providing fewer and fewer opportunities for individuals to find employment and earn a living wage, EOC is giving potential and seasoned entrepreneurs the opportunity to learn about starting and expanding a business through our Regional Rural Microenterprise Support System project. In "Turning Passion into Profit," find out how this special pilot project is helping individuals in rural communities become their own boss and turn their dream and their passion into reality. I am very proud to mention that our Agency was one of four organizations nationwide selected by the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO), which is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Even more exciting is that our Regional Rural Microenterprise Support System program will help the AEO develop models that can be replicated by other organizations in rural America.

Through the services offered by Transit Systems, we are also helping minimize the financial pinch that many on fixed incomes are feeling.

In "On the Move," discover how Transit Systems is giving seniors and disabled adults the flexibility to travel in their communities and countywide at little to no cost. Also, read how organizations with commercial vehicles can benefit from our experienced and certified mechanics.

Finally, in "Paving a Path to Success," learn how a unique class offered at our charter school, School of Unlimited Learning, or SOUL, prepared students to enter a competitive workforce. This class gave students the work experience, tools, and confidence needed to enter the professional field and be a head above the rest.

Though it seems that times are tough and may be getting tougher, we at EOC are ready to help those who are being affected the most: low-income individuals striving to succeed on their own two feet but are falling short of their dream. With your support, I know we can make a difference!

Warm regards,

Roger Palomino
Executive Director

Turning Passion into Profit

While working as a barista

making lattes and macchiatos, Sam Rubio began dreaming of one day opening his own café in his hometown of Mendota. The 24-year-old found a great location and even dreamt up the perfect name – Di Amici, Italian for “of friends.” The young entrepreneur, however, learned quickly that a thriving business needed more than an ideal location and catchy name.



Sam Rubio is the proud owner of Di Amici Café in Mendota.

With no previous business experience and limited business know-how, Sam knew he needed assistance in creating a business plan that would not only establish but grow his coffee shop. Fortunately, he learned about and enrolled in Regional Rural Microenterprise Support System (RRMSS) – a unique program designed to create microenterprise opportunities and enhance existing business ventures in rural Fresno County.

The RRMSS program helps residents in rural communities become financially

A thriving business needs more than an ideal location and catchy name.

stable by unlocking their hidden business potential. Results of a 2005 survey commissioned by EOC showed that Mendota residents financially impacted by changes in agricultural technology, land retirement, water shortages, and other factors desperately needed a way to augment their incomes and could do so through microenterprise ventures.

“I didn’t realize how in over my head I was getting,” admits Sam. “Beyond a name and location I hadn’t given much thought to where I was going to purchase my ingredients, who my target audience was going to be and how I was going to advertise my business to them, and what I should charge my customers.”

People come in with wonderful business ideas, but are simply **not prepared** for the business world.

Sam and dozens of other business hopefuls and entrepreneurs attended a 6-week series of RRMSS workshops where they learned about various business aspects including consumer behavior; product, pricing, and marketing strategies; business law; and had a one-on-one loan consultation.

Munir Hasan Khan, RRMSS instructor and lead consultant, says feelings of uncertainty and doubt are not uncommon. “People come in with wonderful business ideas, but are simply not prepared for the business world. Entrepreneurs don’t need a formal education, or a degree – though it is helpful; but they do need to be prepared, be business savvy, and be as knowledgeable as possible to make their dream of owning a successful business a reality.”

RRMSS, a project of the Association for Enterprise Opportunity and administered by EOC in partnership with the University Business Center of California State University, Fresno, and Valley Small Business Development Corporation, is made possible by a three-year grant funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Other businesses assisted by the RRMSS program include an auto repair shop and tire repair shop in San Joaquin, freight brokering in Mendota, and a mobile welding company in Firebaugh.



Consultant Munir Khan facilitates a workshop in consumer behavior.



To learn more about these no-cost workshops, please contact Gabriela Romero at 263.1029.

On The Move

EOC Transit Systems

He doesn't drive, but getting around the mountain community of Auberry hasn't been a problem for Ed Hansen. For the past 10 years, Hansen has depended on EOC's Transit Systems to take him to medical appointments, the senior center, even down to the Fresno/Clovis area. "It's the best!" exclaims the 64-year-old. "They take me anywhere I need to go."



Mechanic Magallanes Erese prepares to service a Transit Systems vehicle.

Big Ed, as Hansen is known, is not alone. Thousands of Fresno County residents, specifically elderly and disabled adults, have benefited from this specialty service. "Last year," says EOC Transit Systems Director Gary Joseph, "we provided 700,000 one-way rides."

EOC's Transit Systems is the Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA) and the Fresno County Rural Transportation Agency (FCRTA) offering social service transportation throughout Fresno County. As CTSA, Transit Systems works closely with various agencies including Central Valley Regional Center, Fresno Madera Agency on Aging, St. Agnes, and assisted living facilities such as Masten

Towers in Fresno. "Our clients are offered safe and reliable door-to-door and curbside services within the urban and rural areas of Fresno County," says Joseph. "All they have to do is inform a coordinator at their senior center or program that they need transportation," adds Joseph. "We'll be there to pick them up!"

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they take me anywhere
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Fresno County Rural Transportation Agency, on the other hand, provides the general public with transportation services in and around thirteen rural incorporated cities and various unincorporated rural communities. For an extremely reasonable price –\$0.35 for elderly or disabled adults and accompanied children or \$0.50 for the general public – individuals can travel one-way within a community; depending on the distance traveled, one-way intercity fares can cost up to \$6.50.

EOC's transit program does more than transport individuals around town and across the county. Its highly qualified mechanics perform routine preventative maintenance on commercial vehicles including school buses and ADA accessible and ambulatory vehicles at exceptionally competitive prices. "All of our mechanics are certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence," explains Joseph. The ASE certifications are the top standards used by the automotive repair industry to test and certify the technical knowledge of mechanics. Transit Systems mechanics are tested and certified in such areas as engine repair, automatic transmission/transaxle, suspension and steering, breaks, air conditioning, and much more; they also continue to receive training updates from our Maintenance Supervisor.



To find out more about Transit Systems, schedule a pick-up/drop-off, or receive a schedule of services, please call 800.325-RIDE (7433).



EOC passenger buses provide service for those in need of transportation.

- Transit Systems is comprised of a fleet of 130 ADA certified vehicles
- An estimated 25,000 gallons of fuel are used monthly
- During 2006 /2007, our drivers traveled a combined 10,669 miles daily. That's almost the equivalent of driving from Fresno to New York and back, twice, each day.

Paving a Path to Success

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Participants complete a leadership activity at Scout Island.



Students enrolled in the Careers and Leadership class pose for a picture with Career Workshop Facilitator Sam Hairston.

and job readiness skills, including career assessment and exploration, assistance in correctly filling out a job application, resume development, and mock interviews; learned how to improve their English and math skills; and attended a leadership-related field trip or had a guest speaker, such as a member of the Fresno Fire Department, nurse, banker, and representative from local technical colleges, talk with them on a weekly basis. “My experience in this class was a great one,” adds Cortney. “I recommend any junior or senior to take this class ... you will learn a lot!”



The Careers and Leadership class was made possible by the 2008 Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit Program, a cash grant program aimed at improving economic diversity and workforce knowledge and skills.

Students from EOC's School

of Unlimited Learning (SOUL) Charter High School rolled up their sleeves this spring and experienced, first hand, the day-to-day activities of a lawyer, nurse, social worker, IT technician, and human resources specialist.

Nineteen students from SOUL's Careers and Leadership class were placed in various internships throughout Fresno County, including an assisted living facility, law firm, and EOC's Transit Systems and Executive Plaza offices. “This internship gave me a lot of information about the career field that I want to pursue and how to excel in it,” says 17-year-old Cortney Robinson.

During the 2007 - 2008 academic year, students were able to register for the class during the fall and spring semesters. Students learned career

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Students socialize on the steps in front of SOUL.