



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Moses J. Williams
318-574-0995

Tallulah Initiative Selected for Major Funding from National Rural Funders Collaborative

Tallulah, LA—(April 4, 2007)—The Tallulah Conversion Project, an initiative of the Louisiana Delta Coalition for Education and Economic Development, has been selected to receive a major grant from the National Rural Funders Collaborative (NRFC). The initiative will receive \$300,000 per year for two years to convert a private detention facility into a regional higher educational institution and workforce development center (Success Center) in northeast Louisiana. Also planned in connection with the center are developing a local manufacturing plant to build modular affordable housing for placement primarily in the Delta and the Gulf Coast regions of the state and creating a community foundation to promote locally controlled philanthropy.

“Our economy used to be driven predominantly by agriculture,” says Moses Williams, coordinator for the Coalition. “Automation of the farming industry and technology significantly reduced the need for manual and semi-skilled laborers. Accordingly, unemployment increased, the education system did not sufficiently respond to the new economy, and there was general disinvestment in the region. Privately-run correctional facilities (including Swanson Correctional-Tallulah) were built as a “replacement” economic strategy for the area; but that strategy, along with the out-migration of many skilled workers and the lack of a prepared workforce, caused other public and private investment dollars to move out of the region, and our communities suffered. We don’t want to see our young people have as their only options to either end up in prison or working at a prison. While many of them have low skill levels and serious substance abuse problems, they have not failed. We have failed them by not providing adequate opportunities or options for their future. This plan to build the Success Center and create new jobs through workforce opportunities like the housing plant represents our commitment to change historic patterns of disinvestment and despair. With the help of NRFC, the state legislature and others, we are going to breathe new life into the economy and create a path to a better future for our residents.”

--more--

The Louisiana Delta Coalition, led by the Northeast Louisiana Delta CDC, is comprised of area elected and appointed officials, church leaders, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders from Madison, East Carroll and Tensas parishes. With inadequate health care, a high mortality rate, high unemployment, and a substantial high school drop-out rate, these three parishes are the poorest in Louisiana.

The decision to develop a Success Center follows the recommendations of a state-funded feasibility study that examined possible new uses for the former juvenile detention facility. The facility provides a uniquely equipped setting for a new education and workforce development center that will be redesigned as a Success Center; to eventually provide a residential setting where young adults can become ready to enter the workforce or an institution for higher education. The Success Center will focus on young people from 18 to 35 years old, providing education leading to a GED or college, job training and placement assistance, and assistance with health and social issues that serve as a deterrent to obtaining an education or job training. The modular housing plant will be constructed near the Success Center and will employ students, as far as practical, from the Center's programs. The state currently is buying the facility and land from the private owners. The Coalition proposes also to create other jobs in connection with the center, as well as satellite campuses in adjoining parishes, particularly East Carroll and Tensas.

"We are pleased to announce the selection of the Tallulah Conversion Project as one of our new grantees," said NRFC Executive Director Jim Richardson. "The initiative is implementing an innovative, multi-faceted approach to strengthening the regional economy. The integrated strategies of this regional conversion project will create an alternative economic strategy for the people of northeastern Louisiana – one that is built on traditional American values of opportunity, fairness and hope."

The Louisiana Delta Coalition for Education and Economic Development is one of five regional initiatives across the United States to receive funding from NRFC. Other recipients include The Indian Land Tenure Foundation/Native American Community Development Corporation collaborative project to support greater economic sovereignty for tribal communities in Montana and Wyoming; marketumbrella.org in New Orleans to increase access to markets and opportunities for urban and rural farmers throughout the Gulf Coast and Mid South regions; and initiatives in the Salinas and Pájaro Valleys and South Monterey County of California to support wealth creation and small farm/small business development for farm-workers and immigrants. Each of the new grantees will receive \$150,000 to \$300,000 annually for an initial period of two years, with the possibility of a three-year extension.

NRFC is a collaborative philanthropic initiative of eleven private U.S. foundations and organized to expand resources for families and communities in regions of persistent poverty. NRFC recognizes that poverty is often a factor of race, class, culture, and power dynamics that are linked and concentrated, and that the reinvention of rural economies is fundamental to eliminating rural poverty and effecting long-term transformative change in rural America. Therefore, NRFC supports community-based empowerment strategies designed to transform poor rural communities and regions into healthy and viable living environments, and seeks to build a movement of support and advocacy for alternative rural economies based on community assets of culture, land and human capital grounded in relationships and values of equity and justice.

###

To learn more about the Northeast Louisiana Delta Community Development Corporation:

www.neladeltacdc.org

For more information on NRFC, please visit: www.nrfc.org