

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS COMPILED BY Jennie Blizzard, Ellen Janes, Courtney Mailey and Carl Neely

Foundation Creates Resource Center for Nonprofits Facing Challenging Tough Economic Times

During challenging economic times, nonprofit organizations often have a difficult time accomplishing their mission with fewer staff and smaller budgets.

The Washington, D.C.-based Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation recognizes these challenges and has created an Economic Crisis Resource Center to help nonprofit board members and staff navigate the turbulent economy. The foundation offers links and brief descriptions of a wide range of events, publications, Web sites, podcasts and blogs. Topics range from innovative approaches to fundraising and marketing to board involvement

WASHINGTON, D.C.



and stress management. In addition, there are toolkits available to help organizations assess the impact from the negative economy. The foundation offers a popular, ongoing series of workshops on additional topics including priority setting, communication strategies and staff retention. The Web site includes links to information and frequently asked questions about the recession to help nonprofits better understand how the current economy affects the nonprofit industry. For more information, visit www.meyerfoundation.org/economyresources.

State Adopts New Identity Theft Law

On July 1, 2009, two new consumer protection laws, the Financial Identity Fraud and the Identity Theft Protection Act, will go into effect. Consumers will be able to freeze their credit without penalty and choose from several additional options to dispute information on their credit file.

A credit file freeze does not block credit bureaus from collecting information but does prevent the dissemination of information to third party companies. The freeze does not affect a consumer's credit scores.

The new law also addresses "dumpster diving"—rummaging or stealing another person's household garbage and personal information with the intent to commit identity theft or fraud. This practice is a criminal offense. Under the new law, businesses are required to have five digits or fewer of the credit card number on the receipt. However, this requirement does not apply to imprinted receipts. In addition, consumers can require credit reporting agencies to prove credit report accuracy.

To read the bill, visit www.scstatehouse.gov/sess117_2007-2008/bills/453.htm. A video summary from The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW6NM0qN-q4.

SOUTH CAROLINA



Maryland Takes Inclusive Approach to Allocating Stabilization Funds



The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has used its Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds to launch a new Neighborhood Conservation Initiative. NSP provides assistance to state and local communities for acquiring and redeveloping foreclosed or abandoned properties to help stabilize neighborhoods. DHCD has targeted the funds to further expand Maryland's current housing and revitalization incentives. To better serve the needs of Maryland residents, the state is collaborating with counties, municipalities, public housing authorities and community-based organizations to design the activities that the Initiative will fund.

DHCD received more than \$64 million in requests and awarded just under \$19 million to Baltimore City, Hagerstown, twelve counties and two public housing authorities.

Together, the awardees aim to produce 500 affordable homes and offer downpayment assistance to 1,000 homebuyers. The remaining portion of the state's NSP funds will support rental housing for low-income households statewide.

For more information on the Neighborhood Conservation Initiative, visit www.dhcd.state.md.us.

NSP information and state allocations can be found at www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/neighborhoodspg.

Virginia Amends Payday Lending Law

In January 2009, several key amendments to the Virginia Payday Loan Act of 2002 became state law. The act, which regulates the industry and caps interest on payday loans at 780 percent APR, restricts payday lenders from offering open-ended loans. Open-ended loans typically carry extremely high interest rates and fees. The amendments also would restrict a single borrower to one payday loan at a time, require lenders to offer a minimum loan term of two pay periods to repay a payday loan, and restrict debt-collecting practices. The Virginia law would add a database to track and enforce these limits on lending.

Payday lenders now must check a database maintained by the Bureau of Financial Institutions to determine whether a borrower has any outstanding payday loans before making a loan to that borrower. In order to comply with debt collection restrictions, borrowers are required to forward-date the check as a security measure, instead of back-dating. Payday lenders also must comply with the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Visit <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?081+ful+CHAP0849> to view the regulation.



New Technology-Based Economic Development Plan Hopes to Attract Businesses and High-Paying Jobs

On March 19, a diverse coalition of West Virginia economic developers, researchers, technologists, service providers and others joined TechConnectWV for the launch of *A Blueprint for West Virginia's Innovation Economy: A Strategic Plan*.

The blueprint marks four years of research and strategic alliance-building by TechConnectWV, which aims to diversify West Virginia's economy by developing science and technology niches into new industries. According to TechConnectWV's executive director, Dr. Kevin DiGregorio, "Technology-based economic development is fundamental to the future of West Virginia's economy. We are a little bit behind, so that means that we have to move at an even faster pace in the short term. This group is determined to help make that a reality." In the short term, the blueprint recommends that West Virginia nurture and develop leadership to propel technology-based development. "We see four areas where we have nascent, but true, competitive advantages: advanced energy and energy-related technology; advanced materials and chemicals; identification, security and sensing technology; and molecular diagnostics, and therapeutics and targeted delivery systems," says Russ Lorince, director of economic development at West Virginia University.

For more information about TechConnectWV, also known as the West Virginia Coalition for Technology-Based Economic Development, visit www.techconnectwv.org or contact Dr. Kevin DiGregorio, at kevindig@suddenlink.net, or call (304) 437-4295.

BizWorks Partners and NCIF Finance First Solar Farm in Western North Carolina

Mountain BizWorks of Asheville, North Carolina, and the Natural Capital Investment Fund recently announced a joint effort to provide loans of up to \$300,000 to sustainable green businesses. Mountain BizWorks provides training, technical and business development support for entrepreneurs interested in expanding their small businesses. The partnership brings technical assistance and capital to businesses that emphasize

social and

environmental

factors as well as economic returns. FLS Energy, Inc. was the first to leverage the capital to build the original solar farm in western North Carolina. Built on an old landfill at Evergreen Packaging in Haywood County, the solar farm is one of the largest in the southwest and includes 3,288 photovoltaic (PV) panels installed on about seven acres. The solar farm produces enough energy to power more than 1,100 homes a year.

For more information on Mountain BizWorks visit www.mountainbizworks.org.

Contact Matt Siegel, director of the WNC Green Building Council, at matt@wncgbc.org, or visit www.wncgreenbuilding.com to learn more about the solar farm.

