



A Perfect TEN

By Leslie Elgood, Chief Executive Officer, New Mexico Community Capital

Joseph Godfrey knew the recycling business before he moved to Taos from Vermont six years ago, but he had never run a business of his own before he bought Recycle Taos in late 2007. Essential to his success, Godfrey said, was connecting with Taos Entrepreneurial Network (TEN), an independent nonprofit organization of entrepreneurs and local community leaders that began as a 2004 project of the Sirolli Foundation spearheaded by the McCune Charitable Foundation.

TEN's philosophy was adapted from the work of Ernesto Sirolli, an innovator in rural economic development. After seeing self-sufficient communities in Zambia pushed into unsustainable types of development by foreign-aid officials in the early 1970s, Sirolli tried a different approach: He tapped into the entrepreneurial spirit of rural residents by backing home-grown initiatives the locals needed and could support. His model has been duplicated in 250 communities around the globe, including Taos, New Mexico.

The core of Sirolli's plan is "enterprise facilitation" — a support system designed to help entrepreneurs turn ideas into viable ventures by helping them find the resources and learn the skills they need to produce, market and finance a product or service. TEN tailored the idea in Taos to fit local conditions including the employment of a trained "network facilitator" to focus simply on networking and let entrepreneurs choose how to reach their goals.

This network facilitator is pivotal to TEN's complex web of relationships. The facilitator works with TEN's executive board and the entrepreneurs who volunteer expertise and advice at monthly network meetings, and the facilitator is the liaison between entrepreneurs and the resources they need. TEN's facilitator acts as a senior facilitator, coordinating the efforts of facilitators in Rio Arriba, San Miguel and Santa Fe counties.

At the monthly network meetings Godfrey found people with the know-how and connections to help him turn the part-time recycling center into a full-fledged service. Godfrey wants to expand his business; through TEN, he was referred to small-business lenders for the money to buy equipment and another collection truck.

"I couldn't do this anywhere else," he said. "Everyone knows everyone else, and we support each other. It doesn't seem like everyone is out for themselves here."

The idea that the Sirolli model might work in Taos began with Owen Lopez, executive director of the McCune Charitable Foundation. The Santa Fe-based foundation launched the project as part of its commitment to combat rural poverty through economic development, Lopez said. It worked with the state's Department of Economic Development, Regional Development Corporation and the city of Taos to support the program in its first few years. Los Alamos National Security (LANS) and the Economic Development Administration have funded program expansion into San Miguel, Rio Arriba and Santa Fe counties as well.

By the end of its pilot stage, TEN reported that 31 new businesses had been created and four businesses were salvaged or expanded in the Taos area. More than 100 jobs were created or saved.

Taos' success inspired the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to award a grant to duplicate the successful program in Doña Ana County of Southern New Mexico.

Finance New Mexico is an initiative of the New Mexico Small Business Investment Corporation (NMSBIC) and its partners to assist individuals and businesses in obtaining skills and funding-resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org.

