



## **COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

The Community Foundation of South Alabama (CFSA) has embarked on a new path with the creation of a Community Economic Development Initiative and a Community Economic Development Grant-Making Portfolio. As part of an overall commitment to proactive grant-making, CFSA has committed to serve a key role as convener, facilitator and funder in the area of community economic development (CED) where stakeholders work collaboratively to address the challenges that are faced by low to moderate income citizens and at risk communities.

The initiative was officially introduced at the Community Economic Development Symposium February 9, 2007, co-hosted by the City of Mobile and CFSA. One-hundred and twenty key leaders from local government, non-profits, for-profits, academia and the faith-based community participated in the Symposium where they began a dialogue to create strategic partnerships that will enable community based solutions to be devised and implemented. CFSA endeavors to partner with and support the collaborations of these important and necessary and alliances.

As a bit of background, the Ford Foundation of New York contacted CFSA in November of 2005 to host a site visit to the Alabama Gulf Coast in order for Ford representatives to assess the long term needs for rebuilding Alabama communities and to determine Ford's interest in funding. The Community Foundation arranged a visit to meet with south Mobile County leaders and low to moderate income residents of the area. Ford representatives also toured the area communities hardest hit by Katrina. Following Ford's visit to Mobile, CFSA held several meetings in Bayou La Batre to convene local citizens and leading for-profit and non-profit organizations committed to the prosperity of the Bayou communities. The purpose was to network people and organizations who were rebuilding in south Mobile County and to assess key community initiatives for community economic development. Prioritized needs were determined such as housing, leadership, education/job training, community health and economic development.

The Community Foundation and the Ford Foundation together identified community economic development for low to moderate income citizens and vulnerable communities in South Alabama as their focus. In October 2006, CFSA received a \$250,000 two-year capacity building grant from Ford and allocated \$100,000 from CFSA's Hurricane Katrina long term recovery funds to create a community economic development initiative and grant making portfolio. CFSA then hired A. Owen Drey III as Director of Community Economic Development to manage the initiative.

To begin the discussion regarding CED, CFSA commissioned the University of South Alabama Center for Health Communities under the direction of Dr. Harvey White to undertake a community needs assessment. “SNAPSHOTS: A Preliminary Appraisal of the Community Economic Development Challenges of Mobile County, AL,” was released at the Symposium and serves as a starting point to enable a learning conversation among community practitioners, stakeholders and social investors. Attention is given to essential community economic development areas including: 1) housing and affordability, 2) workforce development and job training, 3) the local economies especially small business, and 4) other emerging areas. These areas are vital starting points for understanding practice, process and outcomes within community economic development. Myriad strategies and methods are employed such as interviews with the officials of each municipality in the county, community and business leaders; surveys; focus group discussions; secondary analysis of existing data; and infield observations. Low to moderate income families and communities and community economic development practitioners greatly informed the process so that taken as a whole, a clear picture might emerge regarding Mobile County’s needs.

With “SNAPSHOTS” to focus discussion at the Symposium, facilitated sessions confirmed the identified issues to be addressed. CFSA will convene stakeholders to enable community based strategies and solutions to be identified or created to address the identified issues. Stakeholders will nominate key leaders in each area to receive CED Leadership Scholarships from CFSA to allow them to witness CED best practices in other communities that have used community based strategies affectively. Likewise, stakeholders can receive CED Community Organizing Funds from CFSA to involve as many citizens in the process as possible that the solutions are truly community based.