

The New Leland Initiative Opportunities Discussion

At early-2008, Leland has a number of strengths and several positive opportunities.

Discussion of Opportunities items

No shortage of grant monies available

- ❑ The number of private grant-making organizations is in the tens of thousands, and total US grant resources is in excess of 164 billion dollars. Federal resources often go unused and un-asked for. Organizations whose sole existence is purposed on charitable giving are successful only to the extent that they give away designated funds. Executives managing such foundations are often evaluated on their ability to hit those goals. That means that there are people ‘out there’ who lose their jobs if they don’t give money to people like us.

Many experienced organizations eager to help

- ❑ There is a very large number of professional organizations who are targeted on (and measured by) helping us get monies, applying these fruitfully, and continuing the process. Main Street, MDA, various government bodies have armies of consultants, workshops, databases, and hotlines available at little-to-no cost to us.

Early wins will be highly visible

- ❑ Any successes—of any magnitude—will be highly visible to our residents and the nearby area. This will ensure we get some early morale benefits needed for making it through the ‘dry spells’ of longer-term projects. This will create a ‘benefit of the doubt’ presumption for us (called the ‘honeymoon period’ in business initiatives).

Central highway location & advance notice on future highway change

- ❑ The 82/61 intersection is of importance to intrastate transportation, and travelers have to go through Leland to get between the three largest towns in our immediate area: Greenville, Indianola, and Cleveland.
- ❑ Highway 82 has throughput rates in the 10K-15K vehicles per day range.
- ❑ The new highway from the new River bridge eastward will apparently have only one exit from the AR border until one arrives in Leland. Leland will become a major ‘distribution point’ for travelers from the West. The timing of the highway completion (6-7 years from now?) allows Leland time to prepare for this.

Some well-known attractions already

- ❑ Leland already has a number of attractions with recognized brands beyond the boundaries of Washington County: The Blues Museum/Festival/Murals, the Henson Museum, Stoneville facilities, the Crawfish Festival. The Christmas on the Creek event could easily be developed into a larger event with wider pull.

Not much need to re-invent the wheel on this

- ❑ Most of the initiatives we need to do have been done before, elsewhere, often, and with variations. We simply need to locate and appropriate this expertise.

We can participate in attraction-clusters (e.g. “trails”)

- ❑ Mississippi tourism groups are working energetically on developing ‘cluster attractions’ involving multiple- locales. The main four getting most attention at present are: The Blues Trail, the Literary Trail, the Civil Rights Trail, and the Civil War Trail. Anything we could develop to be included in these clusters would suite MS well, especially given our geographical location (i.e., the logistics goal of short distances between stops).

Small, manageable community to start with

- ❑ With a population of only around 5,500, a labor force in the 2,000 range and a closely knit community, creating momentum, visibility, early wins, and measurable successes will be much easier than in a town 3-4 times our size. Our ability to communicate quickly and widely with our constituency is a very powerful tool.

Highly enthusiastic community/atmosphere

- ❑ Currently, motivation for improvement is high, and optimism is beginning to surface again. Resident loyalty to the town is quite strong, and enthusiasm/hope seems easily kindled—in spite of the apparent magnitude of some of the development needs within our town.

Low level of advanced IT (Information Technology) adoption in surrounding area

- ❑ Judging by the number/size of IT support firms in the County, advanced IT technology adoption is quite low. This could allow Leland to take a leadership position in this sector very easily (e.g., creation of a few tech-training programs, knowledge transfer programs, student chapter of BDPA, PC certification testing center). And this would generate some economic inflows, as Leland delivered services to other towns over the next 4-5 years (bringing them up to speed).

Historic district has National Register status and Leland is a Preserve America town

- ❑ National Register status confers many advantages to original buildings in the district, with many of these being financial. Federal and State tax credits, significant grant opportunities related to Preserve America are available to businesses and homes in a large area of Leland. This is unique in our County, and could be a boon to both investment and revitalization.

A Pool of available students during the summer

- ❑ Our students—both college and high school—are an excellent labor pool to tap into for some of these projects. Some will be done on volunteer basis, of course, but we should seek to find funding for their summer labors for the city.

There are several promising facilities/areas in Leland which could be exploited:

- ❑ The old Armory. This is an ideal facility within which to house a computer classroom, run summer technology camps, deliver Arts & Crafts events, offer seminars/lectures, and other small venues.
- ❑ Railroad Triangle. Suggestions have already circulated about this area, with discussion focused on making it a park. As a multi-use park, we could, for example, create/rent a small musical stage out to emerging music groups, who would pay for the opportunity to play to an audience (a ‘testbed’ environment), on selected Saturday afternoons. They could ‘pass the hat’ to whatever crowd they drew, and our youth A/V-tech students could film them and practice creating music video’s for the group. This would offer a steady stream of novel attractions to our park.

There are other community-oriented facilities which might be exploited:

- ❑ The property of Christians United. This is a central location with much promise.
- ❑ The old Dime Store. This could be developed into a multi-use facility too (e.g., mini-mall for arts/crafts on selected weekends, family reunions, technology classes, biblical studies classes, etc).

Web 2.0 tactics will allow us to tap into non-local resources for local problems:

- ❑ The video websites. This is an ideal space to reach out beyond local resources, to get involved with our community growth and life.
- ❑ Social networks. The LinkedIn's of the world will allow our professionals and leaders to expand their influence and to communicate the life of Leland.

We are part of the focus of the Delta Economic Center:

- ❑ This will afford us opportunity to contribute to the success of the surrounding area (bringing all of us together). We will help 'fight alongside' the other Delta communities to bring enterprise into the various locales.
- ❑ We will also be the beneficiary of their micro-level efforts (e.g. helping us with tourism, with building vacancies, with housing improvements) and macro-level efforts (e.g., highway improvements, large new businesses on the River).