Latinos, Loggers and Old Hippies:
Rural Revitalization in the Pacific Northwest
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Adele Kubein for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology presented on May 22, 2009.

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Abstract approved:

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ABSTRACT

This ethnography looks at the processes a rural Oregon community is undergoing as some members attempt to re-animate the community by creating a community center after the loss of its school and market, two vital services that provided venues for social interaction and engagement.

The methodology for this research includes ethnographic interviews and coding, with grounded theory analysis. Triangulation was conducted with participant observation and analysis of pre-existing data. This research project draws from a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to generate relevant and accessible information (Whyte 1991).

This revitalization project is led primarily by women who draw on varied professional and service-oriented backgrounds to seek funding, plan the project, and run the day-to-day operations of the Community Center. Though this project is led by a long-standing group of community leaders, two important community groups were excluded from the planning process. The Board failed to reach out to low-income Anglo and Latino/a community members in the planning process. This
omission led to a diminished user and supporter base for the Community Center and precluded expanded funding opportunities for the project.

Interviews with members of the Latina community provided a picture of a group of women equally determined to achieve their goals. These mothers perceived many of the same needs that other community members did, such as the need for youth services, childcare, and transportation. But they had the added burdens of language and exclusion which created further barriers to what they considered advancement.

Low-income Anglo informants produced the same perceptions of need, but also provided a rich view of rural subsistence strategies and lifestyles. Low-income Anglo families did not feel as excluded from the Center’s planning and activities, but they were still isolated by lack of transportation. Their exclusion was mainly by choice rather than due to the barriers which precluded Latina participation.

After analysis of interviews and board/community interactions, I developed a list of recommendations for the Alpine Community Center Board. My recommendations to the Board are as follows:

- Create Services for Latino/a residents.
- The Board should pursue funding targeted to underserved populations.
- Expand offerings for youth.
- The Board should actively pursue methods of providing transportation to the center.
- Seek means of improving leadership capacity of the Board through seminars, publications and associations with learning institutions and local professionals.
- Target outreach to underserved populations in order to invite participation in planning meetings and raise the level of community engagement.

Some of my recommendations have been implemented by the Board as it continues to plan the project and operate the Center, though the Board still has a ways to go toward full inclusion of diverse community members. My findings
regarding rural Latino/a and low income Anglo subsistence strategies and lifestyles have the potential to add to the body of knowledge regarding rural life and rural community revitalization.
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

_________________________________
Adele Kubein, Author
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the unheard voices of South Benton County residents. Perhaps this research will bring the hopes and needs of the community to the attention of other caring eyes. Thank you for sharing your lives and your aspirations for the future with me.

I would like to thank the Alpine Community Center board for their dedication to their community and for their assistance with this research. Board member Dorothy Brinkerhoff deserves particular thanks for her un-ending patience with me as well as her contributions to her community. I would also like to thank Professor Nancy Rosenberger for her patient and thorough reviews of my work; I am a much better communicator because of her input.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Latinos, Loggers, and Old Hippies: Rural Revitalization in the Pacific Northwest

## Chapter 1 Alpine and a Community Center
1.1 Introduction and Setting ................................................................. 1  
1.2 Objectives ..................................................................................... 5  
1.3 Community Description ............................................................... 6  
1.4 History of Project ......................................................................... 8  

## Chapter 2 Literature Review
2.1 Changes in Rural Communities and Their Roles in American Life .... 11  
2.1.1 Community Identity .............................................................. 12  
2.1.2 Newer In-migrants, Their Roles, Needs, and Effect on Rural Communities . 14  
2.1.2.1 Latinos in Rural Communities ......................................... 15  
2.1.3 Youth ................................................................................... 18  
2.1.4 Families ............................................................................... 19  
2.1.5 The Role of Women and Seniors ........................................... 21  
2.2 The Role of Leadership ............................................................... 23  
2.3 Community Action ...................................................................... 25  
2.4 Assessment and Evaluation ......................................................... 26  
2.5 Social Capital ........................................................................... 27  
2.6 The Place of the Rural in an Urban World ..................................... 30  

## Chapter 3 Methodology
3.1 Research Design .......................................................................... 32  
3.1.1 Sampling .............................................................................. 34  
3.1.2 Questionnaire ....................................................................... 34  
3.1.3 Interview Protocol ................................................................. 35  
3.1.4 Triangulation ....................................................................... 35  
3.2 Definition of Community ............................................................. 36  
3.3 Definition of Involvement ............................................................ 36  
3.4 Rationale for Qualitative Approach ........................................... 36  
3.5 Handling of Materials and Analysis .......................................... 37  
3.6 Personal Reflection on Research Methods .................................. 38  
3.7 Limitations of Study ................................................................. 39  
3.8 Offsets to Limitations ............................................................... 40  

## Chapter 4 The History of the South Benton Community
4.1 History of South Benton County ................................................. 41  
4.2 Communities of South Benton County ....................................... 42  
4.2.1 Bellfountain .......................................................................... 42  
4.2.2 Irish Bend ............................................................................ 43  
4.2.3 Monroe .............................................................................. 43  
4.2.4 Alpine ................................................................................. 44
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter 4

4.3 Origin of the Alpine Community Center ............................................................... 44  
4.4 Alpine Community Center Planning Meeting ....................................................... 46

## Chapter 5  Findings: The Voices of the Community ....................................................... 52

5.1 Perceptions of Needs ............................................................................................. 52  
5.1.1 The Needs of Youth and Children .................................................................. 52  
5.1.1.1 Youth........................................................................................................ 53  
5.1.1.2 Children .................................................................................................... 56  
5.1.2 Transportation ................................................................................................. 57  
5.1.3 Other Perceived Needs .................................................................................... 58  
5.2 Conflicting Projects ............................................................................................... 61  
5.3 Missing Voices ...................................................................................................... 61  
5.3.1 Latina Voices .................................................................................................. 62  
5.3.1.1 Felicia ....................................................................................................... 63  
5.3.1.2 Lucia ........................................................................................................ 65  
5.3.1.3 Maria ........................................................................................................ 69  
5.3.1.4 Laura: A Latina Youth ............................................................................ 71  
5.3.2 Low Income Anglo Families .......................................................................... 71  
5.3.2.1 Jody .......................................................................................................... 72  
5.3.2.2 Rosie and Her Family .............................................................................. 75  
5.3.2.3 Other Examples ........................................................................................ 79  
5.4 Views, Visions, and Uses ...................................................................................... 80  
5.4.1 Walter’s Vision ............................................................................................... 80  
5.4.2 Jack: Pessimist but Still Activist ..................................................................... 81

## Chapter 6  Findings: The Alpine Community Center Board ........................................... 83

6.1 The Role of the Alpine Community Center Board ................................................ 83  
6.1.1 The Alpine Community Center Board of Directors ........................................ 84  
6.1.2 Professionalism ............................................................................................... 85  
6.2 Interviews with Two Board Members ................................................................... 87  
6.2.1 Dorothy: An Optimist ..................................................................................... 87  
6.2.1.1 Interview 1: The Beginning .................................................................... 87  
6.2.1.2 Interview2: Hopes and Visions ................................................................. 90  
6.2.1.3 Interview 3: Progress .............................................................................. 91  
6.2.2 Alternative Vision ........................................................................................... 94  
6.3 The Board in Action .............................................................................................. 95  
6.3.1 The Transition Task Force ............................................................................. 95  
6.3.1.1 Teams and Their Purposes ....................................................................... 98  
6.4 The Issue of Inclusion ......................................................................................... 104  
6.5 Attempts to Animate the Community .................................................................. 105  
6.6 Failure with Another Chance ............................................................................... 107  
6.6.1 Hope .............................................................................................................. 109  
6.6.2 Ford Family Foundation ............................................................................... 109
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 7  Analysis: Broader Implications</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Community Development: Changing Expectations</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Evaluation of the Board</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.1 Leadership Strengths</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.2 Process</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.3 Shortcomings</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.4 Exclusion of Population Segments</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 The Role of Women in Leadership</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 The Role of Social Capital</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 Followers</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7 The Roles of Participatory Action Research (PAR)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.1 PAR: Interaction of Researcher and Community</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7.2 Assessment</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8 Excluded Potential and Unmet Needs</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8.1 The Latino/a Community</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8.1.1 Needs and Potential Contributions</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8.1.2 Latina Focus on Youth and Children</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8.2 The Needs of Low Income and Senior Residents</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8.2.1 The Needs of Working Mothers</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8.2.2 Seniors</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 8  Recommendations and Conclusion</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Summary of Recommendations</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Conclusion</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliography ................................................................................................................... 138

Appendix A ..................................................................................................................... 141

Appendix B ..................................................................................................................... 142

Appendix C ..................................................................................................................... 144

Appendix D ..................................................................................................................... 147
Chapter 1 Alpine and a Community Center

1.1 Introduction and Setting

Each rural town has its own culture and population, its secrets and history. Alpine, Oregon is no different. An old bumper sticker dating to the 1970s reads: “Old Hippies Don’t Die, They Just Move to Alpine Oregon”. Indeed. In 1983, when I moved to Alpine the harvest time odor of high quality marijuana vied with that of cut timber. Jerry Carnahan, the local sheriff used to set up a road block on Alpine Road that he called a ‘safety inspection’, which was actually a sniff test. But a look at Alpine is more complex than loggers, yurts, hot tubs, drinkers and tokers. Certainly there is the Alpine Tavern of lasting fame. When I moved there Wayne Hammer still owned it. The wiry old man had a full head of white hair and a house full of taxidermy. During his decades as a government trapper he had collected hundreds of animals which he then preserved, many of which have not been seen around those parts for decades. One evening my daughter, then six years old, came out of Wayne’s bathroom through the wrong door. My first clue was the shriek of fear as she came face to face with a stuffed bobcat which Wayne kept in his bedroom. She turned and twisted in the maze of critters until we managed to extract her. Wayne finally decided to sell the tavern the night one of the participants in a barroom brawl literally ran right over him. Hammer showed me the footprint on his back and said ‘I’m over eighty years old, and I can’t take this any more.’

It was mostly the men who hung around the tavern, but the women were equally as interesting. There was June Urbach, who taught me how to pit scores of cherries in a day with a potato peeler. A widow with a big hulk of a son, she did an amazing amount of work in a day, from tending the cattle to pruning the orchards. She and her son grew cherries, apples, and cattle fodder on three separate plots of land. She humbled me. Once
I worked alongside her I realized that nothing I had ever done was as strenuous as a day
in her life. I remember Elizabeth White, another widow. At the age of 72 she went bear
hunting with a male friend of hers, equally as aged. They shot a bear far up into the west
hills, field dressed it, and each of them carried half of it down the mountain. The mounted
head kept watch over the stuffed swordfish, also her catch, in her living room. She helped
a friend build a log cabin from scratch with trees they harvested by permit from public
lands. They dressed the logs by hand and set each one, the final product shaded by firs on
land deeded to him in appreciation for his service to his employer, a lumber company.

Dolores “Dodo” Mintonye was still alive then, a physically unattractive woman
with a sense of humor and intelligence that was compellingly attractive. Dodo was
disfigured by an endocrine disorder, yet managed to catch a handsome husband and
become a mother. She and her sister used to drive around in a decrepit Chevy Chevette
which leaned to the side because her sister was so heavy she broke the shocks on the
passenger side. Dodo once told me that the kids in school called her that to make fun of
her, but she determined not to let them hurt her, so when anyone asked her what her name
was she told them “Dodo”; she said that she took it for her own so that no one could hurt
her with it any more. She inherited her husband’s appliance store, a symbol of Alpine’s
former greatness, which by that time had become a three story, wild west, wooden wreck
with peeling yellow paint and hollow windows which once stood on the corner across
from the Alpine Market. When I met her for the first time she scared the heck out of me. I
stopped in to the old post office, which had just become the Alpine Market to get
directions, and she gave an evil laugh and sent me all over the county. I still had the
courage to come back and ask her again, and we became friends. She told the best jokes
and was one of the women who did hang out in the tavern. The day she died I wept. I
hold many more of their stories and lives in my memory, and I consider myself fortunate
to have known them before they took their history with them. Some were tragic, and
some joyous, but all of them were the hearts of the town. They lived through depressions
and booms, and together they created community.
Twenty-five years ago a group of them, including June, Elizabeth, and Dodo, decided that their town needed a community center. These leaders emerged from dissimilar groups: farmers, loggers, and ranchers who had lived in the area for more than one generation and newer in-migrants who had left urban areas during the 1970s back-to-the-land movement. These newer residents were not the only urban dwellers to chase their dream of pastoral living; in the 1970s, rural America experienced a demographic turnaround as population gains in rural areas exceeded those in urban areas for the first time in 150 years (Johnson 2003, Lewis 1998). Some of these 1970s in-migrants to Oregon were eventually integrated into the community, where they became leaders in their own right, working alongside multi-generational residents to build a park, generate community revenue through festivals, and build social capital through shared activity. This group hopes to build a community center which will provide services to the South Benton County geographical area in which they reside. In the process these leaders strive to re-animate the community itself.

Social scientists have long researched community relationships, interaction, and structure whether it be that of Australian aborigines (Warner 1937), or small town processes in the United States (Vidich and Bensman 1968). In spite of the fact that eight out of ten Americans live in urban areas, most of the nation’s natural resources are rural. Rural communities are seen as stable, and pastoral, an American mythos (Brown and Swanson 2003, Richardson 2000). For those who have never lived in rural areas of the United States, or are unfamiliar with them, rural areas are often seen as backward, simple, ignorant, and isolated (Richardson 2000). Yet rural communities are enmeshed in the global economy, affected by global events, and in an age of telecommunication, some rural communities are far more connected with the rest of the world than urban residents realize. In an era of concern over global warming, fuel usage, and pure food and water, rural communities hold the potential to provide urban areas with local food, clean watersheds, and new forms of industry and economies, such as organic farming, nut production, and sustainable timber, all of which are labor intensive. The means by which rural communities maintain their identity, deal with economic and social issues, and
survive, have bearing on the future welfare of the nation, and are worthy of social science research. Richardson writes: “Understanding the changing nature of rural regions. . . is vitally important if we are to be able to provide for future generations. The present transition. . . from an economy based primarily on the land and its natural resources to one of increased diversity of economic linkages and social constructs is a major one” (14).

Rural villages once were self-sufficient communities that provided their own form of “insurance” in the form of family and social networks, shared labor, and local food sources. As rural communities become enmeshed in the larger economy, resource extraction replaces subsistence livelihood, with the raw products of rural areas going to industrial centers in return for income used to purchase products previously undesired or no longer available locally. In the United States many rural communities underwent a transformation from self-reliant communities to an economy based on resource extraction and exportation. Some communities began to disintegrate as the resources were depleted and rural residents migrated to the cities in search of employment (Johnson 2003: 30, Richardson 2000, Mazie and Killian, Ilbery 1998, McGranahan 2003). The combination of out-migration and the rise of massive, industrial farming have left vast swaths of formerly inhabited land in the center of the United States with reduced populations. The states of Iowa, North Dakota, West Virginia, and Ohio experienced some of the lowest rural growth rates in the nation between 1990 and 2000 (Census 2000). In the mining communities of the Southwest shuttered windows gape on empty streets (Personal observations). In the timber producing areas of the nation, towns began to shrink as forests were depleted. What was once thought of as an un-ending resource came to an end; some land was converted to other uses, some is still held in tree farms, some converted to mid- and upper cost housing, and some now lies fallow and exhausted.

David A. McGranahan finds that globalization and technological change have created considerable uncertainty for nations, regions, and communities over the past twenty years. For rural communities in the United States, the “Rural Renaissance” of the 1970s gave way in the 1980s to a loss of economic base and marginal local economies.
Recently released data from the 2000 Census suggest that the 1990s were quite different for rural America—85 percent of nonmetropolitan counties had lower poverty rates in 1999 than a decade earlier (McGranahan 2003: 149). Richardson writes that rural America is a diverse, changing, multifaceted, and complex. “Simple” life is far from simple (Richardson 2000).

The Pacific Northwest has experienced significant cutbacks in employment and income as the timber industry withdrew to other countries that retain some old growth forests. Some of these Oregon communities have revitalized by becoming “bedroom communities” for larger urban areas, some have shrunk to a way point on a map, losing stores, schools and residents, and some are struggling to maintain their identity and reform as revitalized communities. In the Oregon Coast Range, and some central Oregon cities such as Bend, property values have risen steadily beginning in the 1990s, which created service and construction economies. An influx of in-migrants, often wealthy, has changed the face of some rural Oregon communities.

1.2 Objectives

Applied anthropologists have a tradition of studying the social processes that create and sustain community and to aid rural people world-wide to assess their needs, map their resources, and to find ways to accomplish their goals through community self-help projects. It is assumed that eventually these projects will be internally sustained by the community. This research project draws from a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to generate relevant and accessible information for the researcher and for the community itself (Whyte 1991). PAR, like other community-based or community-driven research methods, aims to work collaboratively and in partnership with community members to develop positive social change and empowerment. In this case a portion of the research was driven by the request of the Community Center Board for information regarding perceived community needs and advice during the planning process for the Community Center.
This is an ethnographic look at the processes a rural community is undergoing as some members attempt to re-animate the community by creating a community center after the loss of its school and market, two vital services that provided venues for social interaction and engagement. This work has a participatory component in that it assisted the Alpine Community Center Board to lay the groundwork for community discussions about plans for positive social change. The research was originally requested by the Alpine Community Center Board to assist it to gauge community support for the project.

There are various levels of questions that this research aims to address. The larger questions are: How does a rural community define itself and its needs? What are the opportunities and barriers for the community as it strives to revitalize? What is needed for a community to sustain a long-term commitment to a project? What roles do community centers play in a rural community and what roles can they play? To answer the larger questions I assessed what the current level of support is for the community center project and asked local residents how they envisioned their community center, what services they currently use and what services they would like to see at the center. I also sought to discover who is left out of the process, and who is instrumental in its implementation. In the process I was able to gather on-the-ground information about community self-definition, and opportunities and barriers to revitalization.

Through this research I sought to assist the community by assessing perceived needs, and the effectiveness of the Community Center’s service provision. I made recommendations to the Community Center Board regarding means of engaging the community in the project. In keeping with the participatory nature of the research, findings have been shared with the Community Center Board, presented at community meetings, and incorporated into action plans generated within the community.

1.3 Community Description

Alpine, Oregon, the South Benton County community which is the subject of this research, is physically attractive, with rolling hills, forests, and grass and Christmas tree fields. Residential properties range from five to twenty acres on average, and since the
early 1990s the area has seen an influx of wealthier in-migrants who are building homes. Property values are rising and some descendants of original settlers have fallen into poverty with the loss of logging jobs. Older residents who worked in resource extraction have few options for retraining and few other job choices. It is becoming one of the “waypoint” communities, with the loss of its local services, yet it struggles to retain its identity. In Alpine and the surrounding South Benton County communities, social interaction, engagement in the arts, active growth of young families, churches, local services, local food, markets, shops and meeting places are recognized as some of the benchmarks of a vital rural community (Community interviews 2007-08).

Alpine is almost exactly between the cities of Eugene and Corvallis, on the lee side of the Coast Range foothills. Highway 99 W runs to the east of the town, a four mile drive from the town center. The highway also divides the South Benton County communities which are served by the Alpine Community Center, with Irish Bend to the east of the highway and Monroe directly on the highway. The town was once dependent on a timber based economy, and to an extent still is, since the Hull-Oakes lumber mill is still operating in the area, using trees from the families’ own holdings. Alpine also depends on Christmas tree and grass seed farming for employment sources.

The residents of the town were once united in their dependence on the land. Apple and cherry harvests were group activities, as were barn raisings and crop processing (Mintonye 1968). In the 1960s and 70s a wave of back-to-the-land in-migrants arrived, many of whom still live in the area. In the last three decades another wave of in-migrants, some with jobs in urban centers, a number of Latino families and retirees have moved into the area, changing the demographic. Property values have risen, and social stratification has increased. Many of the newer in-migrants are highly educated. The town numbers 176 residents according to the 2000 census, with approximately another 200 residents scattered in the surrounding hills. The communities of Bellfountain and Irish Bend (no census data) to the north and the east respectively, interact with Alpine socially and economically as does the larger town of Monroe to the south (pop. 607, 2000 census), bringing the total potential users of the center to approximately 1500 individuals.
In 1980 the town had a fire hall, store, repair garage and gas station, tavern, school, and church. The main street was lined with wooden buildings dating from the early 1900s. In 1989 the gas station/garage, old appliance store, and the old houses in between the two structures were demolished and modular homes put in their place. In 1990 the town pooled its resources and installed a municipal water system and waste treatment plant, funded with a federal grant and maintained by a tax levy on all users of the system. The tavern, fire hall, and church remain, though it is the church in Bellfountain that provides regular services. The plot of land that is now Alpine Chapel Park was once home to Simpson Chapel, a pretty little white chapel, lovingly constructed by local residents in 1903. The chapel was destroyed by fire on June 15, 1973 (Cloutier 1977).

1.4 History of Project

The property which is across the street from the Alpine Primary School was deeded to the community garden club in a bequest left by a local woman, Alta Rainey, in the early 1980s. Shortly after, the construction of the park began, including the construction of a cedar wood shelter with a brick fireplace and picnic tables which some hoped would eventually be a community center. In 1983 group of Alpine area residents including myself, planted trees in the park, and residents have continued to maintain the park into the present time. The group which began construction on the park envisioned eventually building a complete community center farther back from the road on the park property. Community members wanted a community center which would be something along the lines of a grange hall: a structure where weddings could be held, youth could congregate, and where community members could gather in numbers to engage in group activities.

The current iteration of the project began in 2003 when the schools in the area were consolidated and the school building became vacant. The community began to use the building for a re-sale shop, pre-school, lending library, exercise classes, computer center, weddings, celebrations, monthly potlucks, and other community activities. A
board was formed in 2003 to administer the project. The building, which had been named the “South Benton County Community Center” was renamed the “Alpine Community Center” so that people would know how to find it.

By the winter of 2006 the Monroe School District appeared willing to sell the school building for a nominal sum or for a symbolic swap with some of the park land across the street, and the board began applying for grants to build capacity. That year an initial grant by the Ford Family Foundation paid for charrette sessions (a group visualization exercise) to gauge support and help the community realize its idea of a center. The charrette sessions were designed by a professional firm to aid the community to visualize what it wanted the finished center to look like and what the configuration and services would be. I attended the charrette sessions along with approximately sixty members of the community which met at the Center. As they discussed their vision for the Center professional architects and facilitators began to draw and note the ideas. Designs were produced and members of the community began to coalesce around the idea of a center that would serve the entire South Benton County area.

Alpine alone does not have enough volunteers to fully staff the Center, or enough people to fully utilize a community center of that size. Regular board meetings have been held to plan, fund, and implement expansion of capacity and users. A number of small grants have been obtained and the Alpine Community Center Board realized that they needed to gauge whether the level of interest is sufficient to generate the amount of energy it will take to go through the long process of grant writing and sweat equity needed to renovate the old school building. The project leaders believed that only a long term level of commitment on the part of all the users of the center will create the conditions necessary to make the project a permanent reality.

A core group of volunteers and administrators remain consistently committed, and community potluck meetings with all potential user communities draw anywhere from three to sixty interested community members (Personal observation). One factor at the start was the individual, exclusionary manner in which each of the communities defined themselves. Since then some members of the towns of Bellfountain, Irish Bend,
Monroe, and Alpine have made an effort to define their joint interest in a community center that would serve them all. This research followed members of the communities over a time period spanning the closing of Alpine School to the winter of 2007-2008 when the community center board constitutes a team of ‘experts’ to assist in planning for the purchase of the building. At that time, the School Board received an offer on the building and presents an ultimatum to the Community Center organizers advising them that an offer from them must be made if they are to retain use of the buildings. I follow up with an update gleaned from ongoing personal conversations and news articles to bring the reader up to date.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Changes in Rural Communities and Their Roles in American Life

Rural mythos, the view of rural life as traditional, simple, and wholesome, is pervasive in the United States. Many Americans associate the identity of their country through the lens of a short-lived period in American history, that of the move westward by settlers. The notion of an idyllic rural existence is still widespread, with successive waves of resurgence in the public consciousness. The American public sees rural society and life as the repository of ‘American Values’, which are embodied in an unchanging landscape of conservatism and community engagement, a place where neighbors help neighbors, and my woes are your woes. There are varied views regarding rural life which range from a critique of modern life with its urban, industrial emphasis, to a view of rural communities as backward and ignorant (Brown and Swanson 2003, Richardson 2000).

Demographic changes over the last four decades have altered the face of rural America. It is important to understand population redistribution patterns in order to understand the means by which rural communities self-identify, by what mechanisms they seek empowerment and how they project their futures. Demographic change fosters future changes in rural communities, and the influx of new people presents these communities with challenges and opportunities (Johnson 2003).

Brown and Swanson (2003) point out that rural communities play important social, economic, and political roles in the nation’s life, and they merit special attention because of the value accorded them in American society (1). Brown and Swanson also argue that the social and economic organization of community life has been radically changed by technological advancements with rural areas affected as well. Therefore differences between rural and urban communities are no longer quite as profound as they used to be (2).
2.1.1 Community Identity

Wilkinson sees community as a “social field”. According to him “A field is a holistic interaction nexus”, in which the parts influence one another. It is dynamic in the sense that it is in a continuous state of change. Elements realign themselves with one another. The character of the social field of community is such that it is not governed entirely by its parts, but is rather the outcome of the interaction of its various parts, thus creating its own character (Wilkinson 1970: 313-14). He claims that community is “. . . a cultural configuration, a field of collective action, and a phenomenological experience of the individual” (317). The rural community of South Benton County has experienced periods of relative stability, but since the 1970s new in-migrants have entered the field of interactions within the community, changing its character and adding to the factors guiding the community’s collective action. What the South Benton County of 1969 saw as necessary to its health and identity is different from the identity and needed services perceived by the South Benton County community of 2005. Yet the community itself is still bound by the same geographical territory which guided its actions in earlier times. People can change the flavor of collective action, and the community might become stratified, but it is still joined by its proximity.

The four communities which make up this study population do see themselves as separate, with individual histories, founding families and means of subsistence, be it Christmas trees, logging, or sheep ranching. But for the purpose of this project individuals have chosen to also see themselves as a single community. Wilkinson claims that the essence of community is social interaction within a territorially bounded location, but which is actually territory bounded by the interactions rather than geographical boundaries.

If the essence of community is a natural process of social interaction. . . there is little doubt that community can occur in [places] were people interact with one another daily. . . While characteristics of the local ecology certainly can influence interaction, it is the social interaction that first delineates and then maintains the local ecology as a unit. . . Social interaction defines territory and not the opposite (Wilkinson 1991:20).
According to Wilkinson, community does not have to lead to stratification or inequity, rather the natural bond of community demands that inequality be challenged. Community is the force that breaks down inequality. “The local territory is where class and community dynamics are played out” (Wilkinson 1991: 22).

Wilkinson also thinks it is crucial for a community’s social life for its people to have access to opportunities to shop, work, and engage in other activities within their local society. A community is a reflection of “. . .the structure and integration of the local version of society” (27). Even though residents of South Benton County are free to shop and travel in other towns and cities, they seek the interactions and structures which Wilkinson writes about. Wilkinson writes: “In interaction, the community persists as a distinctive, centering element of local social life in America” (Wilkinson 1991: 31). He goes on to write that communities hang together where people live together and interact on matters concerning their common interest in the locality (34). If this is so, then potential exists for disparate community members to unite in common goals. “Each actor has a real interest in the local aspects of local social life. This interest which local residents have in common. . . is pursued in social interaction and thus is shared” (35). Shared interests arise in social interactions, and this creates a bond.

Rural communities identify themselves differently than urban communities. Rural residents have a view of their communities as tightly knit, ideal places to raise families. Hummon (1990) agrees with this premise in his study of Valleytown, a small village in California. He heard residents describe their community as “family oriented” (Hummon 1990: 57). Hummon found that when villagers talked about their town, they identified their community as a superior place to raise children; people felt it was safer and easier to keep track of their children (57). This contributes to a community’s self identity as a unified group in which everyone is responsible for the welfare of the youth and children within it. By proxy this self identification of the community as shepherd or guardian of youth has the potential to create a collective mindset of mutual responsibility between residents.
Hummon thinks that villagers conceive as their towns as a place of community. They argue that small towns have intimate human relations, people are concerned with children, and families stick together. They also see the town as a haven, a relief from the “problems of American life”, in other words, as the locality of a simpler life, a place where everyone knows everyone else (67-68).

The way a community self-identifies will affect the ways it expresses its moral imperatives. If a community sees itself as compassionate, progressive, conservative, or as the keeper of public morality or a place of joy and celebration, it will act accordingly. Hummon writes: “Community ideology plays a critical role in this process. The symbolic landscape of community ideology provides a convincing rendering of varied, social, moral, and other qualities of communities and their inhabitants, diverse qualities that can be appropriated for self-characterization” (142-43).

2.1.2 Newer In-migrants, Their Roles, Needs, and Effect on Rural Communities

Johnson (2003) sees demographic change as a causal agent, fostering changes in the social, economic, and political landscapes in rural America. Johnson cites a turbulent history of demographic change in the 1970s when rural America experienced a turnaround, with growth in excess of birth rates in rural areas of the United States. Between 1990 and 2000, of 2,303 non-metropolitan areas studied, 73 percent of them had increasing population. Of that growth, 6.9 percent was due to in-migration and 3.4 percent due to natural increase (22). Population gains in non-metropolitan areas exceeded those in metropolitan areas for the first time in 150 years. The rural turnaround waned in the 1980s only to increase again in the 1990s. Johnson writes: “Recent arrivals may differ from the existing population along multiple dimensions of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, life cycle, and work experience and knowledge” (19-20). Johnson claims that people may move to rural areas in pursuit of lifestyle changes, but that they may still expect a level of services commensurate with services they received in urban areas. Nevertheless, these in-migrants also bring new talents, ideas, and ways of doing things. Johnson sees this as an infusion of human capital in geographical areas that have
lost much in the preceding years, “Newcomers bring expertise and skills that may reinvigorate existing institutions and create new ones” (31).

There are other changes as well. Rural populations are becoming more diverse. Johnson writes: “Between 1990 and 2000, minorities accounted for nearly 39 percent of the population increase in nonmetropolitan areas. In nonmetropolitan counties not adjacent to metropolitan areas, minorities accounted for 48 percent of the population increase. Latinos were prominent in the growth of both adjacent and non-adjacent areas” (25).

2.1.2.1 Latinos in Rural Communities

Saenz and Torres (2003) note that the Latino/a population is one of the fastest growing population segments in the United States. Many Latino/as have deep rural roots, and are not strictly clustered in urban areas as is commonly believed. Saenz and Torres find that many Latino/a immigrants are increasingly settling in rural areas by preference, because they come from rural areas of Latin America (57). They use data from the 2000 census to create an age profile of nonmetropolitan Latino/as, which shows that this population is quite young. Nearly 37 percent of non-metropolitan Latino/as in the country were less than eighteen years of age in 2000, compared to only 27 percent of all nonmetropolitan residents (Saenz and Torres 2003: 59-60).

Saenz and Torres think that the trend of significant growth in Latino/a populations in the United States suggests that Latino/as will remain a part of the rural landscape, and will continue to be important in rural communities facing population declines and labor shortages. This trend is manifest in South Benton County where Latino workers fill many Christmas tree plantation and farming jobs. The number of South Benton County agricultural jobs appears to be in excess of the numbers of willing Anglo South Benton County residents to fill.

But Latino/a immigrants to rural areas have more to offer than ready, cheap labor. Shutika (2005) in a study of Latino immigration to Kennett Square, a rural Pennsylvania town, found a reciprocal influence as migrants settled into the area. After initial conflict
Mexican immigrants began to buy homes and engage in community leadership actions, including advocacy and enforcement of building codes. Initial racist opposition to the new residents shifted somewhat as the Anglo community engaged in an internal dialogue regarding racism and inclusion. The dialogue expanded to include the entire community as a progressive group of citizens began to meet with a cross-section of the population. The meetings were designed to increase local participation in general community events as well as address the immediate issue of Latino/a integration into the community. The effort fell short of envisioned goals of community participation and inclusion because White participants did not make the effort to reach out bilingually. The lack of effort reflected an unwillingness to take further steps toward inclusion. Nevertheless Latino/a participants and community members exhibited a willingness to engage in the process and in community building efforts in their town.

Marshalltown, Iowa, faced problems similar to those faced by Kennett Square, with a rapid influx of immigrants resulting in community tensions. Many Anglo community leaders were willing to break down cultural and language barriers between themselves and Mexican newcomers. “Their leadership has gone a long way to make the new migration ‘work’ as much as it has. As leaders, they readily recognize the important role Mexicans have in the long-term economic and social health of Marshalltown.” (Grey and Woodrick 2005: 151). Grey and Woodrick conclude that further integration will occur as Latino children are born in the town, and as time passes. Latino parents recognize the opportunities available for their children in the United States, therefore they have incentive to put down roots and become more involved in their community. Grey and Woodrick see good long-term prospects for community involvement and inclusion because there is a strong commitment to making it work among Anglo community leaders. Key institutions such as schools, police department, and health care also strive to serve the entire community (152).

Recognition of the potential Latino contributions to rural communities is not confined to Anglo activists. Within immigrant communities is an internal recognition of their own contributions to the community. Hernandez-Leon and Zúñiga (2005) found that
the Latino immigrants in the rural area they studied exhibited a sense of self-confidence and appreciation of their contributions to the local economy and community life (266).

Rather than generally choosing to isolate themselves, Latino/as come to rural communities with a desire to learn how to communicate and participate in their new community. An ethnographic research project authored by Tina Dodge Vera, Megan Patton, Lina Loaiza, and Margaret Henning, conducted in fall of 2006, found that Latina women found language differences problematic, but rather than having volunteers they deal with learn Spanish, the women wanted the opportunity to learn English, (Vera et al 2006:3). DuBry (2007) found a strong bent toward community engagement, including a desire to learn how to communicate on the part of Latino/as who moved to his study town of Mecca, California.

In order for immigrants to contribute they need support. Schools must support bilingual education, the Anglo community must include newcomers, and provision of other services must be culturally appropriate. Since children and youth are one of the factors engaging and anchoring Latino families to their new communities, education is of import. Saenz and Torres (2003) write: “. . . while Latinos have much to offer their communities, they also have numerous needs that require attention in order for them to contribute to the development and sustainability of rural communities.” (70)

Saenz and Torres write that the most significant challenge facing the Latino/a community today is education. “Current demographic trends suggest that today’s Latino youth will be called upon in the coming decades to generate the revenues required to sustain national and local economies”(63). The extent to which they can succeed in the job market will depend on two things: the degree to which structural barriers are removed, and the degree to which they can attain access to education and other societal resources (63). Saenz and Torres also remind us of the diverse nature of the Latino population, and note that many rural educational programs are short on bilingual education programs and other targeted educational services (63).

Lichter et al (2003) recognize the trend of Latino in-migration into rural areas. They write that policy concerns usually center on migrant labor families, and ignore
indigenous Latino families. They find bilingual education and other services lacking, and they recognize that the influx of Latino in-migrants to rural areas will reshape these areas. (105-06).

2.1.3 Youth

Latino youth are not the only young persons who find rural educational opportunities curtailed. Lichter et al (2003) write that America’s rural children are “. . . often overlooked. Literally and figuratively out of public view” (97). The implications are that the problems of rural youth are often “ignored, unrecognized, or poorly understood” (98). Policy dialogue often centers on urban issues, and concerns for rural school-aged children often go unheeded. Lichter et al cite a number of studies regarding alcohol abuse, drug use, and juvenile crime. Over 30 percent of rural adolescents report being a victim of theft at school, 11 percent have engaged in fights, and 14 percent have been threatened with physical assault (U.S. Department of Education in Lichter et. al 2003:102-03). Rural youth are more likely than their urban counterparts to use alcohol, even at young ages, and this figure jumps to 78 percent by the 12th grade (U.S. Department of Education in Lichter et al 2003: 103). They go on to write that early intervention programs can be effective, but many rural schools lack the resources to implement these programs (103).

Lichter et al claim that strong families, informal community social networks, small, local schools, and faith based institutions will steer youth toward positive development (97). In examining some rural communities they find that this claim is valid: “Good citizenry has always been emphasized in rural areas through youth development programs such as 4H Clubs and other community and school-based programs” (107). But they find rural deficits in schooling and educational achievement. They emphasize education for the same reasons that Saenz and Torres do: it is essential for making a successful transition to productive adult roles, and to good citizenship (101). Lichter et al conclude that in spite of the wholesome stereotype associated with rural youth, they face critical disadvantages and developmental issues. Today’s rural youth may be poorly
prepared for the workplace, family life, and for civic engagement unless efforts are made to identify, understand, and address critical issues facing rural youth (108).

2.1.4 Families

Though rural poverty is not as widespread in Oregon as it is in other states, two papers published in Oregon address this issue. *Profiles of Poverty and Hunger in Oregon*, written in 2006, is a publication of the Oregon Food Bank. This publication focused on people receiving emergency food assistance, therefore the population sampled is already clientele of the food bank. Nevertheless some important data emerges. The paper found that lack of affordable housing contributes to instability (5), a problem exacerbated by the gentrification of my study area with its influx of moneyed property buyers. Affordable child care was another factor, with working mothers unable to maintain steady employment due to child care issues (6). Ten percent of emergency food recipients cited child care as the key to improvement of their present situation (26).

Another paper titled *Food Insecurity in Rural Benton County* (November 2005) authored by Joan Gross and Nancy Rosenberger, is an ethnographic look at food insecurity in rural Benton County. Gross and Rosenberger corroborate the Food Bank’s paper when they find child care a factor in rural poverty. Gross and Rosenberger cite this quote from an informant: “I would bring home only three dollars a week after childcare and gas. I would be robbing Peter to pay Paul, the bill collector.” (11) Gross and Rosenberger recognize that child care costs are even a factor in families with two working parents (11). Gross and Rosenberger also corroborate the Food Bank’s findings regarding housing costs as a factor in poverty. The researchers found that housing costs have had a steep growth rate in the past decade. (16). Transportation was also cited as a factor in this research paper. The lack of public transportation, and fuel and maintenance costs limited the ability of low income households to shop at less expensive locations and to avail themselves of services (21).

Gross and Rosenberger examined sources of social networks in small, stable communities. They found that school, work, and church are three important sources of social networking (24). Gross and Rosenberger conclude that lack of well-paying jobs,
distance from jobs and low cost food, decline in home-based food production and preservation, cost of housing, healthcare and childcare are all everyday problems for rural low income residents and families (29). In areas such as Alpine where rentals are scarce, property values are increasing, and transportation is costly, these barriers create further divisions between wealthy in-migrants, large land-holders and lower income population strata.

In a 1990s study of household subsistence strategies, McGranahan (2003) argues that one cannot understand how people in rural America make a living by focusing exclusively on formal employment. He identifies three types of economic strategies: subsistence activities or self-provisioning such as hunting, household maintenance such as canning, or doing one’s own repairs and informal economy work that involves pay or exchange. All of the low-income informants interviewed for this research utilized a combination of these strategies to augment their income. McGranahan finds that this type of activity is “. . . important for far more than economic gains. Indeed at times economic gain is a minor motivation” (148). He suggests that this is a difficult research topic, as people are at times unwilling to admit gains through informal means, or because respondents consider this type of work to be social, in order to help neighbors, with minimal concern for compensation (148).

Sherman (2006) finds that within small rural communities the choices that low income family members make affect their community standing through the creation of a form of symbolic capital which she calls “moral capital”. Coping strategies which might appear irrational in urban settings are important means to maintain community standing in rural communities. Hunting, fishing, gardening, and other means of labor which support the family increase social standing by the creation of moral capital. Sherman claims that rather than a strictly economic reading of class distinction, social distinctions arise based on behavioral and moral norms. Perceptions of individual’s moral worth are based on their coping behaviors, with those found lacking in moral capital by the community the subjects of social pressure and community level censure (893).
Sherman writes that the most respected of coping strategies are those related to subsistence food provision. Hunting and fishing, as well as gardening and animal husbandry are respected provision mechanisms (897). Rural communities are tolerant of poverty, but they reject members who do not exhibit initiative and effort to provide for themselves and their families.

2.1.5 The Role of Women and Seniors

In the South Benton County community study which is the basis of this thesis, women, as is often the case, are in the majority on the Alpine Community Center Board, and in many other volunteer capacities. Ann R. Tickameyer and Debra Henderson (2003) find that women’s roles in rural community have actually changed little over the last century. What has changed is the interest shown in those roles by researchers (109). My personal observations of female roles in the Alpine community are supported by Tickameyer and Henderson’s finding that rural American women today still work hard, both in the formal and informal sector. They cite many of the activities which I examine through interviews and participant observation: food production and preservation, wage labor, caretaking of the elderly, craftwork, and informal exchanges of goods, services and labor. But they find that social and economic changes have pressured women to diversify their roles. Tickameyer and Henderson write that one realm where women’s efforts have gained new prominence is in the area of political mobilization and activism. The primary opportunities for and targets of women’s activism often are in grassroots responses to the realities of their communities. Women are composing a strong cadre of grassroots organizers and workers. Their contributions have always been central to local issue-based activism in small towns and rural communities.

Jean Richardson provides an example of a project led by women which is very similar to the Alpine Community Center project. Fairfield, Vermont includes two unincorporated villages, with a total population of about 1,600 people. There had once been small schools scattered about the area, and numerous buildings such as the ones that once dotted Alpine. In the 1980s schools were consolidated, and by the early 1990s the railroad ceased to pass through the town. The village had become little more than a
bedroom community. Richardson begins her study with a particular look at one woman who left New York City and moved into the area in the 1970s, began a business, and settled in. Her name is Michele Bessett. Bessett noticed it was stressful for many in town to have to travel to find a doctor, shop, transport children to school and so on. When she heard the school building was about to be sold she mobilized other families to act quickly to preserve the structure. A group of mostly women came together to determine how to make the property useful to the public.

The group heard about seed grants for community based ideas and Bessett was designated as a spokesperson by the group to approach the local university for a grant. Jean Richardson was director of the rural development project that the group approached, and she became involved both as a researcher and participant. Richardson advised the Fairfield community members as they determined collaboratively what common purpose they might have for the building, and as they set goals and the group struggled to gain confidence in its ability to provide the town leadership with a clear vision of the planned use for the old school. The group established a board and learned how to set up formal rules of order and how to deal with laws and state permits. The group went to work on building renovation, and today the old school is a thriving community center which serves not only the immediate village, but also the neighboring communities. The center houses a rural health clinic, a senior citizen program, Meals on Wheels, after-school and summer programs for children, adult basic education classes, and other programs. One group of volunteers built recreational facilities to attract children to play in the community. Each of the programs is run by a small group of volunteers, some of whom obtained their own seed grants to get their particular projects off the ground. The project is not perfect, the center has incurred some debt, and it still struggles to keep the money to run. Yet it has reinvigorated the town and the region, and inspired community members to be active in their communities (Richardson 2000: 1-7).

Richardson thinks women and seniors can offer strong contributions to community projects. They can energize communities. Richardson finds that women and senior citizens are some of the most important local resources, and she thinks that placing
them in leadership roles can be the key to successful programs. She calls women “A centrally important factor for sustainable rural community development” (Richardson 2000: 34).

2.2 The Role of Leadership

Richardson recognizes the structure and value of effective leadership. She writes: “Strategic rural leadership is collaborative. It involves a diversity of people, opinions, and perspectives and is grounded in an understanding of the physical and cultural environments of the local community. . . . Strategic leaders must be dedicated” (87-88). She also writes that leaders must be able to be open to opportunity (Richardson 2000: 92-5). Richardson points out that images of rural America which imply egalitarian cooperation, such barn raisings and harvests, are simplistic. Leadership roles in rural America are more complex and in a state of change, in line with the forces that are changing their communities (92-3). Leaders must be able to be open to opportunity, and understanding of the complex social characteristics of their community. Needs must be assessed and stakeholders identified. Stereotypes and labeling, which remove complexity and ascribe assumed values, must be avoided and conflicts addressed (92-5). Richardson writes: “The most successful leader will set a tone that promotes professional development and skill building in all of the collaborators” (100).

Vidich and Bensman, in their seminal look at rural community, Small Town in Mass Society (1968), claim that leaders in rural areas often originate from middle or upper class backgrounds and draw their support from dominant groups in the area. Therefore it is not only their own narrow class interest they express but that of their power base. Leaders are constrained to develop programs which are ‘combinations and compromises that reflect the [interests and the activity] of these groups’” (283). The limited demographic that produces leaders is a disadvantage when various groups are not represented in the decision making process. Leaders who originate from a higher socio-economic status than that of other community members may not be aware of the overall needs of their community. When a community project depends on general community
support and engagement, the leadership must strive to include the needs of the entire community rather than strictly those of the dominant group and the leaders it supports.

Vidich and Bensman write that rural leaders do not operate in a vacuum; their roles are complicated by the influence of outside events. Vidich and Bensman claim that decision making in a community is not a specialized function. They found that the same individuals, some of whom occupy no formal positions, are involved in decision making which affect different aspects of the community. (Vidich and Bensman 1968: 282).

Vidich and Bensman (1968) claim that when taken in the context of larger societal changes, even leaders seen as hard-boiled realists “become genuine romanticists, and so it appears that it is precisely such romanticism which seems to keep the local community functioning regardless of the stresses and strains under which it operates” (283). It takes a certain amount of dedication, inspiration, and romanticism to inspire and guide a community through the pitfalls and setbacks that accompany most community projects. Community leaders may base their plans on solid financial planning and statistical imperatives, but it takes energy and an encompassing vision to engage the larger community in such a project.

Leaders are ineffective if they are isolated from or ignorant of the motivations and needs of their followers. Hustedde writes that rural leaders face major limitations in assembling the knowledge and resources for effective community capacity building. They are limited by organizational size, and they rely on volunteers who may lack the organizational skills needed to deal with complex leadership challenges, (Hustedde 2003:112). Hustedde goes on to write that organizations and communities may rise or fall because of their leadership, but leaders cannot operate without followers. Effective followers are committed to a cause outside themselves, not necessarily to the leader/s as individuals. Leaders who become defensive or dismissive are likely to weaken their own influence (112-15). Effective followers are eager to learn more, acknowledge problems, and seek solutions. They are committed to the cause, not to the leaders (Hustedde 2003: 112-15).
Hustedde writes that community based leadership is a fluid construct, with roles exchanged based on the best interests of the community; it is a sharing of tasks and ideas, where leadership is validated by the consent of the followers (116). The ethics of community based leadership involve the well being of everyone in the community at large, and the purposes of leaders and followers must be consistent with the values of the community (117).

2.3 Community Action

Richardson (2000) makes the case for integrating research with community action. She cites local efforts, sometimes with financial assistance from local businesses or philanthropic foundations, which may fill in some of the service gaps in regions hit by reduced government subsidies. She points out that it is difficult to determine what works and what doesn’t and why, so that new efforts can build on lessons learned. Richardson critiques the traditional academic approach where papers and conferences are aimed primarily at the academic community and the study population is excluded from dissemination. This approach often does not result in lasting community development. Richardson writes: “The community must be engaged in the development of the vision, research, and interpretations and in designing solutions. The community too, must assess progress and make changes. This has to be an ongoing process. . . (32). Richardson finds that women and senior citizens are some of the most important local resources. She thinks that placing women and seniors in leadership roles can be the key to creating successful programs. (34).

William Foote Whyte also makes the case for integrating research with community action through participatory action research, or PAR. Whyte writes that PAR “Involves practitioners in the research process from the initial design of the project through data gathering and analysis to final conclusions and actions arising from the research” (Whyte 1991:7). Whyte explains that PAR evolved out of three steams of intellectual development and action: 1) social research methodology 2) participation in decision making by low-ranking people in organizations and communities, and 3)
sociotechnical systems thinking regarding organizational behaviour. Whyte challenges the mainstream view that the social researcher should confine herself to the discovery of basic scientific facts without involvement in action. He does not argue that research is void of practical significance, but he questions the view that it is up to others to make use of that research. He espouses the view that it is important for science and human advancement to devise strategies in which research and action are closely linked (8). Richardson also recognizes strengths in the scientific method, but she reminds us that it can discourage contextual thinking, which is essential for application and assessment (Richardson 2000: 72-4).

Whyte writes about the history of worker participation in decision making, which creates loyalty to companies and increases efficiency. He applies this to explain why the top-down technology transfer model, where professionals determine what works best for low-ranking people in organizations, is less effective than participatory strategies (10-11). Whyte traces the third line of PAR’s intellectual development to the recognition in the 1950s that a factory or other organization can be seen as a social system. This recognition includes an important idea: “the workplace is not simply a social system; understanding behaviour depends on integration of social and technological factors” (12). Whyte extrapolates this to urge interdisciplinary collaboration as well as inclusion of study populations in the research as active participants (13).

2.4 Assessment and Evaluation

Richardson delves into the need for assessment as part of the process of community revitalization. Richardson writes that evaluative processes are important to understand social linkages and she thinks evaluation and assessment are tools which can be used to increase the effectiveness and success rate of rural development projects (Richardson 2000: 72).

Richardson discusses the need for ongoing assessment in rural development processes. Evaluative processes are important to “. . . understand and capture the synergy that might possible be taking place at the linkage points of different activities in the rural
environment. Richardson wonders if evaluation and ongoing assessment of projects should be used to increase the effectiveness and long-term success of a rural development project. She sees evaluation and assessment as an integral, ongoing aspect of rural development activities, not as a separate activity taking place after the project is over (72). There should be several intents to evaluation: 1) to strengthen projects and permit learning to take place, making changes where needed as the project evolves 2) to encourage multiple approaches to the problems at hand 3) to be grounded in the community, creating a participatory process and allowing for flexibility, and 4) to build capacity in the community.

Richardson, echoing Whyte, writes of the strengths in scientific perspectives, but reminds us that sometimes they discourage contextual thinking. “Because ongoing assessment/evaluation is an essential element of [rural development] it is necessary to compare the scientific method with other research methods, understand the differences, and acknowledge the need for more than one approach to rural development research and project work” (73-74). Richardson goes on to explain that the number of possible variables in rural development is much larger than the average scientific experiment. All of the ecological, economic, and sociocultural components that might affect the desired outcome must be considered (74). She points out the difficulties of assessment when all of the players in a rural project must be comfortable with each other, and be able to cope when their ideas are challenged. Richardson claims that that defensive responses will hamper community development (79-80). But it is not only the Board which must engage in assessment. Richardson writes: ”The community must be engaged in the development of the vision. . . the community too must assess progress and make changes.” (Richardson 2000: 32).

2.5 Social Capital

Effective leadership and engaged followers are not the only factors in successful community projects. Cohen and Prusak expand Whyte’s recognition of organizations as social systems when they write that work is a human, social activity that engages the
same social needs and responses as the rest of our lives. People need connection, cooperation, support and trust, a sense of belonging, fairness and recognition (Cohen and Prusak 2001: x). Cohen and Prusak define the norms and social relations embedded in social structures as “social capital”, a phrase not of their own coining, but one which they define and refine. Cohen and Prusak define social capital thus: “Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities, and make cooperative action possible” (4).

For Luloff and Bridger, community development programs that focus on social capital can help to build connections. Luloff and Bridger claim that in communities with “high levels of trust, strong norms of reciprocity, and dense networks of civic engagement, people feel an obligation toward one another and are better able to work together for the common good. Social capital develops as trust, reciprocity, and engagement reinforce one another” (Luloff and Bridger 2003: 206). But social capital is not a strictly rational choice. It is easy to understand why the recipients of benefits participate. For donors however, the motives that lead them to participate are less clear.

It is important, however, to address the extent to which social capital is fungible. It is not always transferable across networks and domains of action. This issue is salient when looking at patterns of stratification that divide many communities. Often voluntary groups and organizations are divided along class and/or racial and ethnic lines, with few linkages among organizations composed of people from different backgrounds. This leads to pockets of social capital that are isolated from one another. Nevertheless, Luloff and Bridger think that people sharing a common territory tend to interact with one another on place-relevant matters. Locality based social interaction has not disappeared and they believe it is the essential element of community (Luloff and Bridger 2003).

Luloff and Bridger see the potential for a focus on social capital to rebuild, or rationally reconstruct the traditional ties that once held our communities together. They also examine an interactional approach which focuses on features of local social life that persist. The interactional approach suggests that community development efforts can
build from existing fields of interaction among a local population. They conclude by writing: “. . . the persistent linkage between community action and well-being suggests that efforts to foster the development of community at a local level must be a key component of rural development policy” (213).

Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora (2003) also examine social capital in the context of rural development. They claim social capital is characterized by norms of reciprocity: “Norms can be reinforced through a variety of processes: forming groups, collaborating within and among groups, developing a united view of a shared future, or engaging in collective action” (214). Flora and Flora theorize that strengthened relationships and communications can result from fostering increased interactions among unlikely groups inside and outside of the community and increased availability of knowledge and information among community members. Community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability are enhanced by developing a shared vision and building on internal resources. They emphasize the inclusion of all citizens in the decision making process in order to ensure commitment to the project or endeavor (Flora and Flora 2003: 223).

Castle (1995) provides us with an overview of change in American rural society with an admonition toward exclusion in community projects. He recognizes the transformation of economic activity and social interactions that have swept the American countryside. Transportation, communication and technical change in extractive industries have played major roles in this transformation. He writes: “Economic distress does not characterize all of nonmetropolitan America, but social adjustment does” (495). He recognizes that some communities have declined and others prospered. Natural, cultural and social amenities can aid in rural development, but such growth requires major social adjustments.

Castle writes that these adjustments create costs that are not only reflected in monetary terms, but also in social terms. Rural poverty is often incurred by the fact that some people are excluded from mainstream decision making (496), and he cites Williams and Dill, who assert that in places where race is an issue plans which ignore racial
differences and relations are “unconscionable” (496). Due to reduced living costs some rural communities attract residents who do not fit any of the former demographic descriptions found within those communities, such as Latino workers, and other residents who commute to local cities for jobs in the service sector. Lack of input into community planning disenfranchises these residents, does not address their needs, and disengages them from participation in community life.

Stauber sees that this lack of investment in rural communities is a critical public policy question for rural communities as well as for the nation as a whole. But he not only focuses on the policy implications inherent in our view of rural communities, he calls for inclusion in community actions, and espouses the view that fostering social capital is an investment of equal import. Stauber notes that “Rural people must play the critical role in deciding future priorities and strategies [for rural communities]. But it must be all rural people, not just those with the most economic and political influence” (Stauber 2001: 19). Stauber writes:

“Economic improvement and growth alone are not enough to sustain communities. They are necessary, but not sufficient. Communities that survive and prosper also invest in building the social and human capital of their institutions and people” (Stauber 2001: 9).

2.6 The Place of the Rural in an Urban World

Castle concludes that special attention for rural people and places is justified, with the recognition of the economic interdependence of rural and urban areas. He urges us not to ignore that interdependence, and writes: “[T]o consider rural places in isolation from the urban is a dead end, because the rural cannot be understood if it is considered in isolation. . . “(497). We should consider the rural as an essential component of a predominantly urban society.

Castle agrees with other scholars cited herein that the nation’s economic and social health is affected by the productivity and welfare of rural people (498). Particular needs of rural communities need to be understood, such as educational needs, particularly for the Latino community. Castle calls for understanding of rural people and places, with a concomitant change in attitude. We must recognize the diversity and complexity of
rural society, and exercise flexibility in decision making. Castle concludes that rural Americans have a good grasp of their own problems, and they are resourceful and resilient. He ends with this: “People who would intervene on their behalf should do so only with a deep understanding of their aspirations, their capacities, their opportunities, and the ways they are connected to the rest of the nation” (502).

So, why should the public invest in rural America?” Stauber claims that we must be able to identify what non-rural America will get in return. He calls for clear answers to the question. His answers include the need to protect and restore the environment, provide de-commodified food and fiber, produce healthy, well educated future citizens, and to prevent urban overcrowding. Stauber also claims that we invest in rural America as a laboratory of innovation. He writes: “Given the small size and strong social bonds, rural areas should have advantages in creating possible approaches.” (Stauber 2001: 20).
Chapter 3  Methodology

3.1  Research Design

This research project draws from a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to generate relevant and accessible information (Whyte 1991). PAR, like other community-based or community driven research methods, aims to work collaboratively and in partnership with community members to develop positive social change and empowerment. To achieve this understanding one aim of this research project was to get community members involved in the planning process for their community center, and enable them to transmit their input regarding community revitalization projects to the Board responsible for governing, generating funding for, and organizing the projects. The other goal of the research was to generate ethnographic data and analysis which would add to the general body of knowledge regarding the role of organizations and their interactions with communities in rural community revitalization efforts.

In early fall of 2007 I met with the Alpine Community Center Board to discuss the research project. The Board expressed interest. Subsequently I met with the community at two general community meetings at the Community Center where I informed community members regarding the planned research. The community expressed interest and individual community members pledged their cooperation in the interview process.

Though the fall and winter of 2007-08 I interviewed community members and attended planning meetings at the Community Center. I was asked to present interview findings relevant to the project to the Board. One emphasis of my interviews was on discovering needs the Community Center might be able to address through planning and fundraising. In addition to the research I conducted for the Board I also sought to form a picture of a rural community’s means of subsistence and adaptation to change. The other
focus of my research is on the process of community organization within the Board itself and the interactions between the Board and the community.

The Community Center Board primarily hoped that the research process would provide previously un-engaged community members with a stake in the project, which is one of the goals of PAR driven research. The Board also hoped that the research process would educate the community regarding services the Center now offers. The Board wanted to build the sense that it was interested in the values and needs of the community.

In late fall of 2007 I began the first individual interviews. I interviewed thirty individuals with follow-up interviews when needed (sample chart attached). Interviews were spaced over the fall and winter of 2007-08 with concurrent transcription and coding efforts, as well as participant observation. Interviews for this thesis were conducted in tandem with actions the Community Center Board was engaged in, and provided not only a needs assessment but an evaluative component as users of the center detailed what programs they used and how well those programs served their needs. During interviews, in order to assess satisfaction with the Center’s current offerings I questioned users of the center regarding their level of satisfaction with programs they used at the Center. One component of my questionnaire consisted of questions regarding perceived needs in the general community, which provided a community needs assessment. Some perceived needs were not specific to the Community Center.

As a researcher I was able to gain information that users of the Center might not have been willing to directly convey to the Community Center Board members. I served as a buffer, enabling people to honestly provide input without fear of offending fellow community members. Richardson points out the difficulties of assessment when all of the players in a rural project must be comfortable with each other, and be able to cope when their ideas are challenged (Richardson 2000: 79-80). I also gave voice to the needs of non-users of the Center. During my presentations to the Community Center Board I fulfilled the role of assessment facilitator, and provided the Board with information which it will be able to use if it moves toward its goals. The information provided also influenced the Board as it decided whether to move in certain directions.
3.1.1 Sampling

Research samples included residents who were directly involved in the project, and users of the Community Center from all economic strata. (Please see Appendix A for a breakdown of samples) In addition, I recognized that there are population strata in the area which heretofore have not had a voice in the planning process, and who do not use the Community Center. In order to provide the Community Center Board with a broad overview of community needs and concerns, as well as provide a rounded view for this research, members of the uninvolved population were also sampled.

Informants consisted of both involved and uninvolved adult residents and included the faith-based community, in-migrant retirees and workers, long term multigenerational residents, land owners, renters, English-conversant members of the Latino/a community, users and non-users of the center, and active Board and volunteer members. Samples were drawn from various socio-economic strata and genders. These units were chosen in order to generate a representative sample (Bernard 2006). Thirty residents were interviewed for this research.

Interviewees were chosen by non-random, opportunistic, purposeful, sampling using the snowball sampling method (Bernard 2006). Informants were chosen for their availability, demographic profile (in order to create a representative sample), and desire to participate in the research. All informants were over the age of 18. (Please see Appendix B for questionnaire)

3.1.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of nineteen questions. The interviewees were queried about their length of residency, age and family status. Two questions sought to assess perceptions of life in the area, both positive and negative. Other questions were created to assess the level of community engagement, and the primary geographical areas in which people traveled for governmental and non-governmental services. Questions regarding the Center itself sought information about levels of use, means of information transmission regarding the Center’s offerings, and satisfaction with the Center’s services. In addition a question was included to assess the perceived needs of the South Benton
County community as a whole, independent of the Center’s offerings. (Questionnaire Appendix B)

3.1.3 Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted over the course of the 2007-2008 academic year. Interviews of approximately 30 minutes with a maximum of one hour were conducted at the convenience of the interviewees, at the location of their choice. Interviews were semi-structured with open ended questions following a general script (Bernard 2006). (Please see Appendix B)

I encouraged residents to talk about their lives in South Benton County in a semi-structured manner, with general quality-of-life questions as a guide. Semi-structured portions of interviews provide a glimpse into subsistence strategies, personal views, and daily life. At times other family members were present at interviews. An informed consent form and informational letter was offered to all interviewees. No compensation was offered.

I would like to note that all of the Latinas I interviewed spoke to me in English after I politely spoke with them in Spanish. The level of articulation in their quotes is theirs alone, with no addition on my part. Accents were thick, and at times I had to query them again in Spanish to make sure I understood what they said, but I have not added words or nuance to their voices.

3.1.4 Triangulation

Triangulation consisted of text analysis of archival survey data and historical accounts, as well as participant observation. I engaged in participant observation where appropriate, to understand the community’s needs and the planning and engagement process as well as to corroborate informant testimony. Field notes were written on these observations which are also coded to protect confidentiality and coded in keeping with grounded theory analysis (Charmaz & Mitchell 2001). Locations for participant observation included the center itself and other area locations with similar services and social activity, such as businesses in Monroe, the Monroe Community Center and
Library, and the Alpine Community Center Holiday Fair. I attended community planning meetings, potlucks, Board meetings, and Transition Team meetings.

3.2 Definition of Community

Community as defined in this research is geographical. It includes the South Benton County communities of Irish Bend, Alpine, Bellfountain, and Monroe, Oregon. Community is also self-defined by the residents, who recognize both individual geographical communities and a generalized sense of community which transcended geographical divisions.

3.3 Definition of Involvement

Participation in center activities was defined as board membership, volunteer participation in the center’s services such as re-sale shop, pre-school, library, and other center services, and simple participation in events or classes at the center and included community members who use the facilities such as the playground or gym.

3.4 Rationale for Qualitative Approach

The rationale for a qualitative approach was to generate data from an ethnographic look at a cross-section of the population. Survey research was not financially possible for this project, and the questions lent themselves to semi-structured interviews because ethnographic data was useful in order to gauge perceived needs for services, perceptions of the community, and engagement with the project. Excerpts of interviews and analysis of data provided information by which the Community Center Board might base their decisions regarding the Community Center project.

Semi-structured interview methodology was a good fit for this project because of the small sample and limited resources available to the Board and the research. Bernard writes: “In situations where you won’t get more than one chance to interview someone, semi-structured interviewing is best. It has much of the freewheeling quality of unstructured interviewing, and requires the same skills, but [it] is based on the use of an
interview guide” (Bernard 2006: 212). Bernard claims that semi-structured interviews leave both the researcher and the respondent free to follow new leads (212).

3.5 Handling of Materials and Analysis

Data was transcribed and number coded to maintain confidentiality. Data included transcripts, field notes, notes from Board meetings, Transition Team meetings, community input meetings, and participant observation. The analytic method used with the interviews was grounded theory (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001, Glaser 1992). Grounded theory involves carefully studying transcripts for themes in order to code them for analysis. Themes and response categories were identified and mapped, analyzed for content, and the Board and general community informed of relevant findings.

As transcripts and field notes were read and coded for themes, themes were written on the margins of the transcripts and then hand-counted for frequency. Any mention of a particular theme was counted. Each person’s mention was counted one time, even if the subject was mentioned more than once by the informant. Numerical summary of themes is presented in Appendix D.

Information was presented at Board meetings and community meetings in keeping with the participatory nature of the research. I made recommendations to the Board regarding planning and use of the center and shared information regarding general community needs and attitudes based on the results of coded interviews. Additional interviews were precipitated as initial interviews produced unanswered, relevant questions. As per PAR methodology, ongoing communication between the Board, the community, and the researcher maintained community engagement with the research.

In winter of 2008 I presented preliminary results of interview data to the principal investigator, and continued to analyze the material. By the end of winter 2008 preliminary themes emerged from the data, and a report was given to the community and the Board. In spring of 2008 I completed participation in the project in my advisory capacity and presented the board with final conclusions drawn from interviews and
participant observation. I continue to make data available to the Board as well as to serve in an advisory capacity when requested.

3.6 Personal Reflection on Research Methods

My relationship with the Board played out on multiple levels. As a community member who was involved with the project at its outset, I was a known entity, to be drawn in by the current Board as a person who had skills to offer. In an effort to assess community support and needs for the project, they tapped my research skills with the understanding that I would also use the material for my thesis. As a respected member of the community with a history of engagement, I was tasked with making presentations to the Board and the community, and with making recommendations to the Board based on the results of my research. It was also hoped that my research might be used to prove capacity and responsiveness to needs as the Board applied for grants, and it was understood that my connections within the community might shed light on the needs and motivations of non-users of the center. I also agreed to be on the Transition Task Force which was constituted from a pool of skilled community members after the Monroe School Board announced it had an offer on the facilities and provided a deadline for negotiations with the Community Center Board.

The Alpine Community Center Board contributed to my questionnaire design by providing a list of programs at the Center, and by expressing their needs at a Board meeting I attended early in the research process. Prior to the beginning of interviews I met with the Board to present the preliminary questionnaire for their comments and input. The needs of the Board and my needs as a researcher equally informed the final questionnaire design.

I did not ask the Board members to interview people. I did ask them to keep statistical data on users of the Center, a request which was never fulfilled. I used them as informants regarding the status of the project, and to provide me with information regarding interactions between the Alpine Community Center Board and the Monroe School Board. Individual Board members were comfortably forthcoming with
information regarding their interactions with the community and with other organizations.

At Board meetings I presented general information the Board asked for. This information included perceived needs expressed by community members, and views of the Center provided by community members. I also acted in an advisory capacity. I suggested outreach to the Latino/a community, and foci for the Board which emerged from my interviews. I received appreciative verbal feedback from the Board for my input, but at the time it seemed the Board did not act on any of my suggestions. In the winter of 2009, when I asked a Board member to clear up some details for me, I discovered that the Board had implemented some services over the last year which had emerged as needs in the course of my research. But as of this time the Board has not yet committed to outreach of the Latino/a community.

3.7 Limitations of Study

This study is not a statistically significant representation of the community. Though efforts were made to generate a representative sample of users and non-users of the center from various population strata, the number of informants does not provide statistical significance. In addition semi-structured interviews do not provide exactly comparable data.

I was known to many of the community members interviewed. This relationship had the potential to skew responses, since respondents were not anonymous to the interviewer. To offset this limitation anonymity was assured for all informants. Nevertheless these relationships were likely to affect responses.

The very act of observation will change the observed. When engaging in participant observation I was careful to allow spontaneous comments and actions, but the very nature of Participatory Action Research implies a connection and inter-relatedness between the researcher and the objects of study. It is impossible to set aside all personal knowledge and see the community from a strictly objective point of view. It was also impossible for the community to see me as a neutral observer.
During the course of this research I was an absentee property owner and former resident of the town of Alpine. I engaged in volunteer projects in the community for over 20 years, and was involved in the original Community Center project. When the Park was seen as the future location for the Community Center I was involved in park maintenance, and was active in community fundraising endeavors such as the original Wild Rose Festival held in the 1980s. Because of this there was an expectation that I would once again fully engage in the Community Center project and perhaps once again emerge as a community leader. To seek balance between the objectivity of research, personal relationships, and community expectations, I had to make my position and level of participation clear to the community. I clearly explained to interviewees and the Board that I had two primary motives: to help the Board in my capacity as a researcher and to conduct thesis research. At no time did I imply that I would once again step into the process as a community participant. In addition, my personal history with and knowledge of some informants had the potential to affect the way I viewed the community and analyzed the material.

3.8 Offsets to Limitations

The relationship between the researcher and the study community also had three advantages: it was hard to provide me with misleading data, and I had access to more informants than an “outsider” might have had. In addition, I had a background of cultural knowledge regarding means of subsistence, livelihoods, and relationships which assisted in my analysis of the data.
Chapter 4  The History of the South Benton Community

4.1  History of South Benton County

By 1909, when the population of Alpine was listed at 500, the Kalapuya and Klickitat tribes’ argument over the area’s resources was a moot point, as few of either survived with culture intact. For much of its current iteration Alpine, Oregon, has alternatively thrived and failed as an investment venue. In 1911 two of the first white settlers and their descendants decided to parlay their initial investment into a full-blown, artificially crafted real-estate bubble. David Webster and his brother Mark laid out over a thousand acres in small orchard tracts, set out apple saplings, advertised in national magazines, and sold the orchards to gentleman farmers in the East. The Webster brothers also invested in the construction of an apple packing plant and a dry goods store. It looked like easy money for buyers and sellers both. An opera house, railroad depot, hotel, churches, an Oddfellows Hall, and stables sprang up. But the boom was short-lived, and the bubble burst. The first fire leveled the community in 1918, and the second fire destroyed the rebuilt community in 1924. But it was not fire alone that dashed the hopes of a community that saw itself on the way up. The formerly forested land was too poor to support the trees and the apples failed to thrive, the Great Depression struck and even the Webster family left Alpine (Mintonye 1963, Cloutier 1977).

Alpine and other South Benton County communities survived as new access roads were built to harvest timber previously inaccessible. Built in the early 1930s, the Hull-Oakes Mill in what is now known as Bellfountain is the last steam-powered lumber mill in the United States. It continues to harvest its own holdings and in the process to employ a reduced number of local residents. In the 1970s, as urban refugees began to stream into the country in search of enlightenment and contentment, land prices rose again as local residents saw profit to be made from ‘hippies’ who they thought were likely to last as long as the eastern ‘dudes’ who were lured to the area at the turn of the twentieth century. Properties sold for outlandish prices by local standards. A property in Bellfountain I lived
on for three years sold for 40,000 dollars in 1976, only to be valued at 19,000 dollars when I arrived in 1983 and attempted to buy the place. The financial hard times of the 1980s propelled a disillusioned return to urban areas, leaving some folks who bought in the 1970s holding property drastically reduced in value. But a successive wave of immigrants some with money created by other speculative investment booms, including the dot-com bubble and real estate investment, began to show interest in the area in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They saw the same value in the land that earlier migrants did and another boom began. Today the community is still engaged in speculative investments, though of a different sort. A number of residents seem willing to invest in the future of the community and are willing to put their efforts into its future.

4.2 Communities of South Benton County

4.2.1 Bellfountain

Bellfountain, nestled in the lee side of the Coast Range, is sparsely populated, with a legal minimum plot size of forty acres. It is hilly, mostly in timber and sheep ranches with a few large fields toward the east side of town. Few people move in or out of Bellfountain, which is also the home of the Hull Oakes Mill. The area around the mill itself was once a thriving town of its own named Dawson (Mintonye 1968). Much of the land in Bellfountain is owned by a few timber growers, and some of those growers are related to each other. Bellfountain extends into densely wooded coast range hills, with many households hidden at the end of winding driveways. Some of the remote households are lower income families whose circumstances have worsened with the loss of timber jobs. Some of the remote properties are also rentals, and a few of them have been purchased by people from out of town and remodeled. Bellfountain’s school was consolidated before Alpine’s and is now owned by a local church group. The religious community ran a private school in the old school house for over four years, but it could no longer afford the overhead and the school dissolved in 2007. Bellfountain’s market and gas station closed over ten years ago, around the time Bellfountain School was consolidated.
4.2.2 Irish Bend

Irish Bend is technically no longer a town. Its school was consolidated into the Monroe school around the time Bellfountain’s was, in the early 1990s, and there are no services and no town center. Irish Bend is primarily a farming community of fertile bottomland to the east of Highway 99W between Muddy Creek and the Willamette River. The town is north of Monroe by about three miles. Irish Bend has a strip of land along Highway 99W which has some rental houses as well as owner occupied residences. Some members of the Latino/a community live in these rental houses. Farms in Irish Bend employ both Latino/as and local youth to move irrigation pipes and for other farm labor, including planting and harvest. The old schoolhouse has been bought by a family from out of state and converted to a lovely home. As with Bellfountain, many of the properties have been in the same hands for at least a generation. I once lived in a house in Irish Bend which was built in 1865 and which is still in the same family’s hands. There is a small influx of people moving from out of the area into the few available non-farm properties.

4.2.3 Monroe

Monroe is now the hub of commerce for the area. It numbers over 500 residents, with a number of recent housing developments which range from low-cost, cheaply manufactured homes, to expensive mansions built in the west hills. The town has a bank, the only post office remaining in the area, all of the schools, four restaurants, a grocery store, a tavern, a fire station, and a police department. Services for low income residents include a food bank and a low income clinic with a regular schedule. There are two mainstream churches and a smaller fundamentalist Christian congregation which meets informally. The town spans Highway 99W, with the majority of residences on the west side of the highway, spreading into the west hills south of Alpine and Bellfountain. There are continuing attempts to open antique stores and a museum in order to attract tourism. Monroe has a large Latino/a population, most of which live in the apartment buildings two blocks west of the main street.
4.2.4 Alpine

Alpine spreads into the coast range to the south of Bellfountain. It also has many remote properties nestled into clearings in the woods. In spite of the many small creeks flowing in Alpine the underground aquifer is depleted, which curtails extensive development. Nevertheless there is a speculative housing development at the top of Larson Road. The effects of the current economic downturn are evident. A number of large expensive homes sit empty atop the hill. A number of old wooded properties have been purchased by new residents. It is not uncommon to see remodeled homes as well as new construction in the area. Alpine is mixed in socioeconomic composition, with some wealthy newcomers, educated professionals with families, working in public and private sectors, multigenerational land owners and a sizeable low income population in the area. The same economic depression due to loss of timber jobs is evident in Alpine as in the other communities. Unlike Bellfountain, Alpine allowed smaller plots of five acres. This led to a higher population with more houses available for rental and less land suitable for farming and ranching. Most of Alpine is now residential, though sparsely settled, with few timber plots and ranches. Christmas tree farms are the mainstay of large scale agriculture in the town. The tree farms provide employment for members of the Latino/a community and local youth. There are some grass seed fields to the east toward the highway.

4.3 Origin of the Alpine Community Center

On a late June day in 2003, Mr. Bailey, the Alpine School custodian, locked the storage room for the last time. He inspected the locked classroom doors along the covered walkways, stood under the leafing maple in front of the school and turned his back on his charge of many years. But the building was not to lie dormant for long. In April of the same year, Dorothy Brinkerhoff, one of the owners of the Alpine Market, hearing about the imminent school closure, put a clipboard on the counter of the market that explained the school closure and asked community members to attend a meeting to discuss a possible community center.
Nineteen years earlier, Dorothy and I, along with dozens of school children and community members, planted trees in Alpine Park and talked about the need for an enclosed structure to house a community center. That same year, in 1984, community members decided to form a non-profit organization to solicit funds for a center. For years invitational races were held, food was sold at a fall festival, and grant money was solicited for the center. Over the span of nineteen years many of the original community center proponents who were members of multi-generational local families died off, and newly arrived community activists moved in to take their place alongside the older residents and in-migrants. By 1995 a permanent restroom was built in the park with grant money, and annual board meetings were held until 2001, when enthusiasm for the project waned. The last $1,000 dollars left in the fund was spent on a “Welcome to Alpine” sign placed close to the store and tavern, and dormant status was requested for the non-profit Alpine Community Center organization.

Then came the 2003 school closure announcement, Dorothy’s clipboard, and a hastily convened community meeting. The first meeting was in April of 2003, shortly after the school closure notice. That April evening the forty community members in attendance constituted a board of directors to look into the possibility of using the defunct school for a community center. The 501 (c) (3) (nonprofit) status of the Alpine Community Center was discussed, and the goal of a community center became once again a possibility. But there had been changes since 1984. Some of the original engaged community members were deceased, and new people had moved into the community. Some of the poorer community members had left, to have their land bought up by in-migrants who could afford taxes and land which were rising in cost. In addition, Latino immigrants are settling in the area to buy land and raise their children.

In conducting this research my goal was to discover the answers to the following questions: Who and what constitutes the South Benton County community? Whose voices will be heard in the planning process, and who will the center serve? By what means will the community attempt to re-animate the collective consciousness?
The Community Center Board understood that responsiveness to the needs of the community would lead to increased use of the center and could lead to increased funding through grants. Since the Board had already sent out a fundraising letter to over 1000 people in the area, there was a database of addresses which I proposed we use for a survey (see attached proposed survey). I found that few detailed records were kept of anything. There were no records of attendance, usage, or contacts with the community. There also were no records of the home communities of any of the users. There were few records kept of respondents to the fund raising letter. I sought to flesh out this meager information through interviews in all four South Benton County communities which use the center. This narrative provides a view of the greater South Benton County community, its lifestyles, and its needs through the voices of its residents. The narrative also provides a look at the challenges and processes of community organization efforts.

4.4 Alpine Community Center Planning Meeting

I attended planning meetings with interest. I still owned land in Alpine, and as one of the community members in the 1980s who shared the community center vision, I was curious to see the level of interest in the project. I now found myself in the position of being able to assist the community not just as a gardener or volunteer, but as an academic, and I regarded the project on a more objective level since I am now a researcher and participant observer rather than a community member with a personal investment in the project. I have not lived in the area since 1997, and after this project was finished I sold my property in the area for personal reasons.

I attended a planning meeting on February 16 2007, which over fifty members of the South Benton County community showed up for. Residents from Alpine, Bellfountain, Irish bend, and Monroe were present. The meeting was arranged around a potluck dinner attended by a representative mix of center users. Everyone gathered in the old school cafeteria. Community Center Board members worked behind the counter to gather serving spoons and to warm casserole dishes in the ovens. On the serving counter vegetarian dishes and African delicacies were interspersed with macaroni salad, pork
chop casserole and mashed potatoes. One community member had recently returned from a trip to Kenya where she worked on village water projects. The daughter of a local female New Age minister had just returned from a trip overseas. While abroad this girl decided to get married and start her own belly dancing troupe. She returned with a husband, a nose ring, and a business as a dance instructor which she was advertising to other community members. Farmers and mill workers were discussing the weather, and older community members were updating friends on the activities of their grown children. A movie screen served as a backdrop, set up for an after-meeting showing of a video two residents made while they were working on the Kenya project, and thunderous noise emerged from the attached bentwood gym as younger community members played basketball while their parents met.

The meeting was not only representative of the mix of interested residents; it was also representative of the voices left out of the planning process. According to a Census Bureau 2006 estimate, 5.7 percent of Benton County is of Latino origin. A sizeable section of that population resides in Monroe and the surrounding areas as logging, Christmas tree farming, and grass seed farming provide employment and housing opportunities for the Latino community. Though there were community members present who advocate professionally for Hispanics, there was not a single member of that population segment present at that meeting. Also according to the census bureau, 12.5 percent of Benton County residents fall below the poverty line. As a long term resident of the area I personally observed deep poverty in South Benton County, yet no one from that group was present.

But there was diversity of a sort within the engaged group. One of the attendees, a School Board member and retiree, has wrested a living through arduous labor as a logger and mill worker and his wife worked as the Alpine school librarian most of her adult life. They struggled to raise and educate their children through hard times. Another Alpine Community Center Board member is a well-to-do, private consultant with a university degree who moved into the area seventeen years ago. Other attendees, some of whom were also on the Monroe School Board, have been supported by farm, ranching, or timber
revenue for multiple generations. Entrepreneurs abounded: from a pump repair business to seamstresses, jewelry makers, organic farmers, commune members, New Age ministers, Christmas tree growers, and consultants. There were at least two people on the Community Center Board who advocate for the community professionally, one is a Health Department administrator, and another a woman who assists the Latino community and runs the summer school lunch program. These are people who know the needs of the entire community. Yet this fuller set of needs was not mentioned at the planning meeting.

Residents from the four communities filled their plates and sat at the tables as the meeting began. Monroe School Board members gave an unofficial report first. The School Board is pivotal to the project. In 2003, after the Alpine Community Center Board was constituted, the School Board agreed to lease the building to the Community Center for a dollar a year in the community interest. As School Board members recounted this history to the group, community members remarked that it was their building in the first place, as it had been their taxes which paid for it. The School Board members explained that they are fiscally responsible to the entire school district, not just the residents of Alpine or the users of the center. The Board members said that they cannot speak officially, but that the School Board preferred to leave the buildings dedicated to the community, so they hoped the community might find a way to purchase the buildings on favorable terms. Community leaders played the part of used car buyers by disparaging the worth of the building--mentioning the asbestos under the building, the leaky windows, and the oil fired boiler which they opined is about to burst.

One gentleman began the conversation by saying: “The first question the community needs to answer is: does the community want a community center? If the answer is ‘Yes’, then we go from there.” A majority in the room agreed that they do want a center. The fellow then asked: “What about the other 2000 or so members of the community, do they support it?”

A lively discussion regarding community engagement with the project was begun by a School Board member who expressed the need for caution and realism. Another man
said it must be used by the whole community if it is going to be called a community center, and that he did not feel comfortable with the project unless it was thoroughly researched. A female Community Center Board member expressed concern about the small number of committed volunteers working at the Center.

Since the Alpine Garden Club holds the park property in trust for the community, the club is also pivotal in the project. Garden Club members vaguely suggested that they might be willing to trade some park property in return for the school building, but they said they will have to discuss it in a full meeting. School Board members said that a property swap might be possible, as long as the School District receives the full value of the school property from the deal. The school superintendent agreed that this might be a feasible plan. The conversation digressed among the value of rebuilding the structure versus building a new structure in the park, what the Center should offer in the way of classes, and if there was actually enough support in the community for such an endeavor. Someone suggested a county tax levy to build and support the Center, but others expressed doubt that the whole population would vote for something they don’t use, and there was concern regarding the costs of renovation. Residents from the four individual communities had their say in the hour-long question and comment session, and people began to dish up desserts.

At this point I joined the dialogue on the invitation of the Community Center Board. I explained that my thesis research will be shared with the Board and the community as they try to decide their course of action, decide who and how the center will serve, and assess what services are needed by the community. I offered to ask for help from the university to design and analyze a survey independent of my research questionnaire (please see Appendix C) which could be used to assess community support. The survey would be mailed out to the general South Benton County community. I explained the importance of providing data that proves community engagement for funding organizations. As the dialogue continued, Community Center Board members optimistically spoke of the excitement they felt at the possibility the Center could one day belong to the community, and of the economic value capital investment in a renovated
building would provide to the community. During dessert some of the adults joined the kids in the gym and the noise intensified as the game heated up. The donation jar by the door asking for supply money began to fill with dollar bills, and I mingled to speak with community members. Since I knew the prior history of the Community Center endeavor, I was interested in the current level of interest and what people saw as opportunity or obstacle for the project. I also hoped to see how volunteers viewed the project and to what uses the Center was being put.

I spoke with a woman who had moved into Alpine from Idaho fifteen years previously when she married a community member; she had been a volunteer at the Community Center re-sale shop. She said the re-sale store is not doing any business because it is isolated out in Alpine; she thought it would be wise to move into one of the vacant storefronts in Monroe. She told me the same stuff is in the shop that has been there for the last year, and she had some observations as a volunteer at the Center. She was frustrated that she could not find the key to open other rooms such as the library or exercise room. She said there are not enough volunteers. No one knows how to run the place because there is no communication or leadership among the volunteers, and she was not taught how to start the boiler to warm the place in winter. She felt overwhelmed when people came for other services when she was staffing the store. She finally decided she was not accomplishing anything there so she quit, and she said that no one stepped up to take her place. Other community members expressed frustration with the lack of open library hours and dearth of teachers available for desired classes, such as yoga or art. Yet others spoke of the services they did use and services they would like to see at the center such as an art studio.

A more optimistic view of volunteering was given by one of the Board members who told me that there are at least 20 volunteers, but she admitted they worked at varying levels of commitment. One of the community members whose family had been in the area for multiple generations, chimed in to say that if they had volunteer labor it will be possible to rebuild the place, and his peers enumerated the skills they possessed and the construction tasks they were willing to do. The subject of a fundraiser came up. Prior to
this meeting Community Center Board members had obtained a list of all local addresses in the four communities and written a fundraising letter which they sent out to approximately 1200 people. One of the Board members remarked that people from as far away as Alsea Falls contributed, and that one person from out of state sent money when he heard about the project from his brother. I asked a Board member how much was contributed and she respond that they thought it was over $3000.

The owner of the local water pump business looked outside and announced that it was beginning to lightly snow. This was the cue for those who live up steep driveways to start gathering their casserole dishes and bowls and head out into the night. Board members busily scrubbed counters, washed dishes, and made sure the ovens were off. I stayed behind to help clean the dining room and talked with Board members who were elated by the high turnout at the meeting.
Chapter 5 Findings: The Voices of the Community

5.1 Perceptions of Needs

The following narratives emerged through interviews at planning meetings and in interviews with community members. There were two types of needs assessment: Services the community wanted to see at the center, and self-identified needs for services for the entire South Benton County area. I also assessed what the users of the Center thought about the quality of services the Center is currently offering. I also heard how community members perceive their community and how they subsist day to day. I learned about the challenges rural people on low or fixed incomes face, and their means of coping. There were several main themes which emerged in most of the interviews, and which I observed as I participated in community meetings and events. These themes included the needs of youth and children, the needs of seniors, and the particular needs and aspirations of the Latino/a community. These interviews and meetings spanned the course of several months. They are arranged by theme rather than chronologically, in order of thematic predominance.

5.1.1 The Needs of Youth and Children

Concern for youth was expressed by both users and non-users of the center across all economic strata and age groups. Both Latino/as and Anglos shared the idea of youth as a community asset which deserved attention and resources. Informants consistently concerned themselves with the needs of local youth. Only three out of thirty informants neglected to mention the needs of youth in the community (see appendix D).

At the planning meeting one woman said: “We need a place for the kids to play, it keeps them out of trouble; we need a youth shelter.” Another chimed in: “What we need is a place for the kids, there is nothing for them to do.” A third said: “The Center should be open at night for the kids and other people; we need teen stuff and dances for the kids.”
5.1.1.1 Youth

Indeed there is little for youth to do unless they are engaged in sports at Monroe High School. There are no skateboard parks or youth centers in the area. Alpine Park was subjected to repeated vandalism until the community finally just tore down the fire place in the picnic shelter to stop youth from burning the benches, and the historic Alpine Cemetery has been wracked by youth who have overturned and broken the headstones numerous times. According to the Oregon Department of Justice Crime Rate Summary Statistics, Benton County juvenile arrests for property and behavior crime in 2004, the last available year, were 123 and 297 arrests respectively, with an overall arrest rate of 486 juvenile individuals across all crime categories in that year.

In the course of an interview with a Latina mother the subject of children and youth came up repeatedly. The mother, Lucia told me that they have lived in the United States for twenty years, with nine of them in the Monroe area. Her daughters are sixteen and thirteen years old, and her son is seven. Lucia told me that she likes Monroe because it is a small town. She said it is a good place to raise your children because the school is small and the kids get attention. She was pleased because there is not much fighting and she knows where her kids are so she has peace of mind. She feels it is safer for the kids because everyone in the community can keep an eye on them and there is less opportunity to get into trouble. But she complained that there are not enough electives at school, and there is only one Spanish speaking teacher at the high school, so the children do not get a rounded education. She spoke of the hard choices she had to make between working hours and her children’s welfare. She was fully aware of the services the Community Center offered though she did not use them because she had no way to get there. She knew about the pre-school, but wished for services for youth. “If there were an after-school program at the Community Center I would not have to leave the kids alone when I work.”

She went on to state that one of the biggest problems around is the lack of after-school activities for youth. “Many kids get in trouble because there is nothing to do after school.” She suggested a bus that went to the Community Center after school, with the
idea that the middle-schoolers would particularly benefit since they are not as busy with sports after school as the high-schoolers. She told me she worries about her kids but she felt that keeping open communication with them by always talking and being ‘free’ with each other was the best way to keep them out of trouble.

Her older daughter jumped into the conversation and recounted a good experience she had at the Alpine Community Center. Dorothy Brinkerhoff and Joyce Long, two of the Community Center Board members, trained a group of youth to lead underage drinking forums at the Center. The daughter was very proud that their group led forums at the local schools, and the group developed a goal to eventually start a teen center at the Alpine Community Center.

Once the girl began to speak she continued non-stop for several minutes. She told me that she was surprised when she first visited the Community Center because she had no idea what was there. She thought a bus to the Center was necessary because the middle-school kids had nothing to do after school. She said: ”The older kids can drive, but the younger ones are stuck using a small room with a few computers at the Monroe Library for a study room.” She liked to work at the Alpine Community Center because it had a bigger computer room and a library as well. “The center should definitely have something for after school and we (she and other youth) are willing to volunteer at the center to help make it a reality.” She repeatedly told me that she and her peers wanted a volunteer opportunity that would allow them to create a space where they could study and play. She was also interested in doing other community service work, even though she had a part-time job and was maintaining a high grade point average at school. I left the household humbled by the knowledge that the whole family worked very hard to succeed; they all contributed to the family’s well being in spite of numerous obstacles, and they also repeatedly expressed a desire to engage in activities that would benefit the community at large.

I also interviewed a 48 year-old woman in Monroe who does not use the Center. She receives permanent disability due to bi-polar mental illness which is controlled by medication. She is unable to drive due to the effects of her medication. She is part of a
low income extended family which thrives by utilizing local resources, a home based craft business, and cooperation in hunting, gathering, horticulture, and food preservation. The family has lived in the Monroe/Alpine area for over forty years, and they once owned the now defunct Alpine Market. Jane lives in a tiny 1930s bungalow in Monroe which she shares with her mother. There is a small fiberglass greenhouse in the yard, and a small vegetable and flower garden. Jane has never had children, and spends her time doing house chores and crafts. She does not go out much and by her own declaration has “maybe six friends”.

The interior of the house was filled with crafted items and knick knacks. There were racks of earrings her mother makes for sale. A home-made crocheted afghan with a cream background and elaborate three dimensional roses covered the couch. The living room had an ironing board and sewing machine on one end, plastic sorting boxes of beads and findings, and a folding table covered with rubber stamps, paper, glitter, and coloring pens to make greeting cards with. A china cabinet held prized porcelain collectibles, and two small dogs vied for attention. Jane and her mother have matching recliners facing the television. Jane was on a rug crafting kick for a while so the floor was speckled with rag rugs in dissonant colors. Her mother was away for a few days at her part-time live-in caretaking job for an elderly distant relative who requires constant care.

In spite of her childless status and her dislike of socialization, Jane strongly felt that youth in the area needed a place to hang out. She said that she might use the Center if there were transportation, and she thought that was the biggest barrier to Center use for both youth and seniors in the area. When I asked her what she thought the Center should provide for youth she told me that the Center should provide a sports area and access to the gym. She also thought the Center needed a game area with air hockey, pinball, and other games. “They need something and they don’t have it in Monroe, and they don’t have it in Alpine.” She felt that South Benton County was neglected, and she told me they don’t even have a police officer, and that their sheriff was not funded. When I asked her if there would be a circumstance in which she would consider volunteering at the Center she told me she would consider volunteering for a youth program. She suggested
the Center would even be a good place for a skateboard park, and if there were a caretaker on the property the kids would be able to use the Center until late in the evening. She ended the interview by saying: “. . . kids are the most important thing there is. Yeah, we gotta raise them to take our place.”

A sampling of the other 28 interviewees turns up numerous mentions of youth and their needs. A woman who belongs to the local faith-based community cited the usefulness of things that would involve kids in positive ways, make them want to learn and participate in their community. One of the Board members was pleased to see kids coming in to use the internet facilities. She talked about the satisfaction she experienced when two girls asked her to help them learn long division a few days before. She also thought there needed to be something at the Center to engage youth “. . . because right now the school is catering to athletes, and that’s great for kids who are athletic, but for the kids who aren’t, they need some kind of venue to express their creativity and channel their energies into ways that aren’t necessarily druggie.”

One informant, a 62 year-old male resident of Alpine who had worked for an urban Boys and Girls Club in the past, expressed skepticism that the Center could provide an attraction for youth. He thought that it would be costly and hard to provide interesting activities because he felt there had to be a big draw, such as bands and dances, and something where there was “solid supervision”. Another member of the faith-based community spoke of the void she perceived for supervised youth activities: “We’ve had a dream for a long time of having a youth center in Monroe. To me there’s just a big void of anything for the kids to do outside of school and sports.”

5.1.1.2 Children

The first organized program at the Alpine Community Center was a pre-school. Dorothy Brinkerhoff, local business owner and board member, is quite proud of the preschool. She told me that they hired a certified pre-school teacher for regular wages, and that the school is currently booked to capacity. She and other Board members think that if
expanded, the pre-school has the capacity to carry the Center to a great extent as an income producing program.

Part of the research I conducted for the Board involved assessing potential use of the pre-school among informants. Parents from the faith-based community and the Latino/a community expressed the need for an expanded pre-school program, which would actually be an after school program, as they were the informants who had younger children. Latina mothers I spoke with told me how hard it was to afford child care when they were making so little. One mother said: “I have a problem getting baby sitter because it costs me as much as I make to pay for the baby sitting. How can I pay more than I make to care for him? I understand the program at Alpine is affordable, but I could not leave work to drive him after school. Because we do not have child care we have problems.”

At an April 11 2007, Community Center Board meeting I spoke with the pre-school teacher. She presented a plan to expand the pre-school into an after-school program for primary age children. She had already explored statutes affecting such a program, as well as possible funding sources. I shared my interview findings with her and the Board with a recommendation to explore the idea as a viable and needed service which has the potential to bring in revenue. Since then the Board has garnered a grant to expand pre-school offerings to a pilot after school program.

5.1.2 Transportation

After children and youth services, transportation was the next most common need, with 18 out of thirty respondents citing lack of transportation as the biggest barrier to center use. An elderly informant told me that she could no longer see well enough to drive the curvy road from Monroe to Alpine at night. Jane said that she was not allowed to drive due to the effects of her medication, and four Latina mothers said that they either did not have driver’s licenses or cars. Members of the faith-based community said they had more children and activities to go to than they had vehicles, and several people with children said it would be useful to have a bus that could transport children and youth from the schools in Monroe to the Center.
In the course of an interview I asked a board member about the transportation issue. She told me the board was attempting to connect with Crowson Bus Company, which is based in Monroe and is the local school bus provider. Her goal was to see if the little bus might be available for an after school program. Apparently the owner of the company, Chester Crowson had done some deals for organizations. The Board member thought that if his drivers were willing to volunteer some time he would arrange a favorable deal on the cost of the bus itself.

5.1.3 Other Perceived Needs

Ideas for the Center abounded both at public meetings and in personal interviews. In separate interviews two local artists stated they would like to rent cubby and working space at the center so they did not have to do their work in cramped household areas. Various artists and craftspeople in the community also wanted an art gallery where they can display their works. One of my informants now rents a booth in Eugene, about 27 miles from her home, to display her crafts for sale. She comes to the Christmas Fair at the Alpine Community Center to sell her jewelry once a year.

Latina community members had their own wishes for the center. An English class for older family members was a need mentioned in all six interviews with Latino/a families. Three Latina mothers, in separate interviews spoke of the problems they encounter due to language differences. One mother thought that the Spanish speaking children were being put into remedial education classes, though what she thinks they need is language instruction. She told me: “When the children are smaller it is likely that the parents speak no English.” Another Latina mother explained how hard it was to help her children with schoolwork due to language barriers. Canning classes came up in nine of the interviews, both within the Latina community and among some of the younger Anglo mothers. Seven female informants mentioned they would be interested if the kitchen at the community center could be rented for canning parties, since it was difficult to do large amounts of canning necessary during harvest season in their own kitchen spaces. At the request of the Community Center Board I did approach a woman from the
Extension Service who stated she would be willing to teach canning classes at the center if it could meet a minimum enrollment number of eleven participants.

Some Community Center Board members are aware of the needs of South Benton County’s low income community. In a strategic planning meeting with the board some possible uses of the center were discussed, among them the provision of space for a food bank and/or a clinic. In an effort to discover if these services are needed or would be used at the center I asked informants questions about the geographical area they travel to in order to receive most of their services including business services, grocery shopping, doctor visits, and so on. For low income residents Monroe is the primary central area for food bank, library, banking, and medical services. Eight low income residents complained that the $20.00 fee to use the low cost medical clinic in Monroe was often more than they could afford. And all low income residents said they could not afford to drive to Corvallis or Junction City often, so they would buy groceries from the bigger stores in those cities once a month.

For Monroe and Irish Bend residents transportation issues were a barrier to use of the Alpine Center; they use the medical clinic, food bank, financial institutions, and library in Monroe. The extra distance to Alpine was problematic for them. Though transportation is a barrier, low income Bellfountain and Alpine residents who need these services often find rides to Monroe with other people who have business to do there. It seems that Monroe is recognized as the central location for services, and local South Benton County residents have found various means of transportation to the town.

Few interviewees were interested in duplicating services they find in Monroe at the Community Center in Alpine. I advised the Board to concentrate Community Center services on things the Monroe community did not provide such as youth services and child care. Monroe also does not have a large kitchen facility available, which is a draw for the Community Center insofar as facility rental.

Facility rental is one of the methods the Community Center Board uses to generate revenue. In October of 2007 a Board member told me the Center was booked all the way out to Easter for events. She listed a Halloween party, two baby showers, family
reunions, and dinners among the events the center was already rented out for. One informant from the local faith based community attended a large family reunion held at the Center, and members of the Latino community said they knew of the facilities and were interested in holding quinceañera celebrations at the site.

A community garden was another suggested service the center should provide. A member of the Latina community complained about the limited vegetable choices at the local Dari Mart. She told me that many Latino families reside in the Monroe apartments, and they are seeking places they can grown their own vegetables. Over a cup of coffee at the local restaurant she said: “It is hard for some of us to be inside all of the time, the people at the apartments want to garden and be outside, and we don’t have good vegetables at the market.” The other respondents stated they grew their own vegetables at home, so they would not use a community garden.

The Center currently provides classes in basic computer skills, dance, and aerobic exercise. The classes have enough attendance to support them. In addition to the need for English language classes expressed by the Latino community, interviewees who were already users of the Center wanted to see expanded class offerings. Many of them stated that they had availed themselves of both computer and exercise classes, though not on a regular basis, and they were interested in other types of classes. Art classes were mentioned by three or four informants. At Board meetings and in interviews ideas were put forth for children’s classes of some sort along with youth classes, but no concrete ideas were presented. Parents who home school their children, and Latina mothers both said they would like to see classes at the Center which would augment their children’s education.

My last interview was with a mother of three children. I asked her if she thought the Community Center could have an effect on life in South Benton County, she replied: “Yeah, I think it would definitely be a place where people could draw together in fellowship, you know. I think that a common goal, I think is important when you have a small community. If they have a common goal there would be a good effect.” She also thought seniors needed help filling out Medicare forms and other paperwork. She told me
her own mother could use that kind of help because Medicaid comes up with new plans all the time which are quite confusing.

5.2 Conflicting Projects

In addition to current services provided in Monroe, the Monroe community has formed the South Benton Library Project to build a community center and library in the center of Monroe. The group obtained a grant to move the historic train station in Monroe to the main street where the plan is to remodel it as a community center. A library building is to be built alongside it. In an interview with an Alpine board member, she worried that there are only so many capable, committed individuals in the South Benton community, and that a number of them are involved in the Monroe library project. She also realized there are only so many funds to go around. In spite of her utter commitment to the Alpine project she realized that the Monroe project is already moving along and she understood the central draw toward services in the bigger town.

Though local organizations are putting efforts into the Monroe Library project, they have also been supportive of the Alpine Community Center project. The local chapter of the Lion’s Club rents space in the Community Center. The combination of kitchen facilities and large gym attracted the Club which makes a sizable donation for operating expenses at the Community Center. One wall of the cafeteria is covered with dozens of banners and plaques from Lion’s Clubs all over the world, including banners from Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Australia, and most of the United States, indicating youth exchanges and projects. The Club uses the gym for youth programs, and the kitchen is perfect for fundraisers and large gatherings.

5.3 Missing Voices

The six individuals who constitute the Alpine Community Center Board range from early middle age to elderly; they are all Caucasian. Though some are wealthier than others, they all live comfortably. Though their residency in South Benton County ranges
from multi-generational, to under eighteen years in the area, they share vision, and lifestyle.

Planning meetings and potlucks drew similar demographic attendance, with the exception of younger families with children. Absent on the Board, and at every public meeting, and scantily present in the roster of Community Center clients, are two broad demographic swathes that are represented in the community: the Latino/a community and low income individuals and families.

In order to gather their voices I used snowball sampling techniques to recruit informants from both demographics. I interviewed seven Latina women, ranging in age from early 50s to 18, and ten low income individuals ranging from the age of 80 to early 30s (please see chart). Low income individuals tended to use the center infrequently, if at all, but all interviewees from these strata had heard about it. Interviews were based on the same semi-structured questionnaire used with other community members. Informants talked about perceptions of the SBC community, what they would like to see in a community center, and about barriers they faced socially and economically. They also spoke about general needs they perceived in the community and what they saw as their place in the community.

5.3.1 Latina Voices

I focused a great deal on the Latino/a community because it is a sizable, yet almost invisible part of the community. If the Community Center project needs bodies to make it viable, the Latino/a community might offer engaged individuals who would be interested in the Center’s offerings and willing to volunteer to make the center a permanent reality. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006 update, Benton County as a whole is 5.7 percent Latino/a origin, or approximately 4500 people of Latino/a descent in the county.

The Community Center Board could not afford to ignore South Benton County’s Latino/a residents if they were committed to serving their constituency. Though specific Latino/a population numbers for South Benton County are hard to come by, the agricultural base of the area predicates a relatively large Latino/a population. The
residents of the apartments in Monroe are almost all Latino/a, and Christmas tree plantations and farms in the outlying areas have residences with Latino/a workers living in them. I personally know of long-term Latino/a residents employed in agriculture which have lived on agricultural properties for two decades. In order to bring forth voices seldom heard I made an effort to interview and present Latina voices for this research. I found no males with the time for or willingness to be interviewed, but Latinas were eager and thankful to be interviewed.4

5.3.1.1 Felicia

Felicia came to the United States from Guadalajara, Mexico nineteen years ago. When I met her at a local restaurant I thought she was much younger than her 52 years. She is dark with a broad nose and short dark hair; her teeth are white and even, the front ones framed in silver, and her body fit. She was decorated with gold. She had a gold filigree cameo on a gold chain around her neck, a ruby ring on one finger, and a silver watch with little diamonds all around the face. Everyone seemed to know her. The waitress and the owner of the restaurant treated her with courtesy and respect. Felicia started the conversation by telling me about herself. She has four children which she is putting through college in the United States and she is determined. She told me that three of her children are actually in college and one is still in high school. She spoke intelligently when she told me she has never been to school. Felicia wants to take English classes, and she pointed out that since I can speak Spanish so well after only two years of classes, she should be able to speak English just as well with little schooling. Felicia wants to go back to school “...but I have four children, and they all have to get a college education, I don’t have time for school.”

Felicia and her husband own a Christmas tree business. They lease a spot of land to grow the trees on, and they have a lot to sell them from. He began as a laborer for a large tree growing outfit, but with both of them working, they saved enough to buy a house and start a business. She told me: “Yes we have a house, but the bank owns it. But this is the land of opportunity.” I mentioned to her that I had spoken with other Latina
mothers who have children, and I was wondering what her friends do for child care. She said she is aware of the Alpine pre-school and wished other Latina mothers knew about it because their children need a good start in life. Felicia felt that the community center does not reach out to the Latino community and was disturbed by the fact that there are no posters in Spanish, though there are English language ones. Similar to other interviewees across the board, she was concerned with services for children and youth. She worried that local Latino/a kids do not learn to speak English well and she felt this was a barrier to their success.

Felicia wanted to see classes at the community center or somewhere in Monroe that both parents and kids could attend. “We like a program so that the parents could learn English and how to help their kids. It is important for the Latino parents to be involved in the schools and schooling, especially when the kids are young.” She told me there is only one person at the high school that speaks Spanish, but he is not a counselor or interpreter, and is not actually there for the Latino kids. She said the kids have no help at the high school. When I asked if there is an ESL program in Monroe, she told me there is no program, and impressed upon me how important it is for her community: “. . . since if the parents learn the language, they can help their kids.” One person from Corvallis came for a while to provide ESL classes but not any more. “It is important that the kids have help all the time, not just once a month, or once a week, or just six weeks, because we forget how to speak English if we do not practice all the time. Sometimes I don’t speak English for three or four months. I have never studied, I just learn from you guys. I would like to go to class so I can write and do secretary work. I would like a class.”

Felicia though that the advantage to living in South Benton County is that here she can start her own business, and buy a home. She stated that language skills are the first step to betterment, and the second is home ownership. She likes the area because it is a good town to live in, and it is good to raise a family here because it is small and safe. “We know all the people and we take care of each other, and I think that is good. It is nice to know where your kids are.”
When asked about disadvantages, she focused first on economics by complaining that the town is too small to support a local business, and the lack of English classes and child care for the younger women. She also said there is no place for the children to go after school, and that the Latino kids are still ostracized somewhat in after school sports programs at the high school. They are not allowed to use the high school grounds for after school activities, particularly soccer games. She also thought that a major problem is the lack of transportation because many of the women either cannot drive or do not have cars. She also spoke up for the less fortunate members of her community when she said that many of the Latina women go to the food bank at the church but the food bank does not provide enough usable foodstuffs, such as beans and tomatoes. But she said it is still a lot of help for them.

Felicia talked about her home and vegetable garden. I asked her if she cans, and she said no, but that she would really like to learn. Talk of vegetables reminded her of the Latino population at the apartments in Monroe, and she explained it would be so nice if there were a community garden in the area so that Latino families could have fresh vegetables. She finished by enumerating other needs of the Latino community, such as a gym, a place to work out, exercise programs, and what she considered very important: a means of sharing cultures with the Anglo population. She told me there are twenty Latino families at the Sierra Apartments in Monroe, and that they are isolated by language and prejudice. She realized that her situation is quite different than theirs and she was anxious to tell me their needs because she hoped I can share them with others. I left the restaurant with introspection and appreciation. Seldom have I ever met someone so determined to succeed and to provide a good life for her family.

5.3.1.2  Lucia

Late in winter on a freezing cold day, I interviewed a Latino family living in a rental house on Highway 99 in Irish Bend. As I walked through the front yard strewn with toys I noticed a large hole covered with plywood in the wall of the house. There was a kid’s razor scooter out front and a beautiful spotted pinto pony in the barn with a red
halter tied to a lead attached to the ceiling of the barn. I arrived as the mother and her daughters were engaged in a cleaning spree. There were dozens of wine glasses, crystal glassware, and porcelain knick knacks spread out on the dining room table as they scrubbed the insides and glass of a tall wooden china cabinet in the dining room. The mother apologized for the mess and explained that this was the first time in ages that all the females in the house had the same day off together so they decided to deep-clean the house. The seven-year-old son came out to say hello at his mother’s prompting; he was pudgy and cute. Her husband came in for lunch dressed in work clothes, scruffy and heavy set, but with a nice manner with the kids. He seemed to love his family and be quite at ease. The older of two daughters fixed a lunch of beans and tortillas for her dad and the younger daughter brought me a cup of Nescafé instant coffee and a jar of sugar.

In the course of the interview with Lucia, she spoke at length about her feelings toward the community and what she perceived as the community’s attitude toward Latino/a families. Lucia works as a janitor in Junction City, which is about seventeen miles south of Monroe, and her husband works at the golf course southwest of Monroe as a groundskeeper. Since she has children in the local middle school, I asked her about her experiences with language barriers at the school. She told me that the middle school has someone who speaks very good Spanish and who helps the teachers communicate. The Spanish speaker is actually the English teacher at the school. When I asked her about the high school she asked her daughter who responded that the only Spanish speaker at the high school is the remedial learning instructor, the person who works with kids who fall behind the average. Lucia exclaims: “But he does not speak Spanish!” When I probed this contradiction, I gathered that either his skills are not good enough to hold a conversation, or that he chooses not to use Spanish when speaking with Spanish-speakers. Lucia thought he works with the kids because they are low in grades, not as a language teacher. She was of the opinion that the Latino kids at the high school are being treated as if they are stupid. Remembering the time when they moved to the area nine years before, Lucia said: “It was difficult a bit, because in the schools there was no person who could help us. We had no one.”
Lucia expressed her appreciation for my research. She explained: “Latinos in the area have no voice.” Partly she thought it is because of language barriers, but somewhat because of prejudice. She thought that what I am doing is important because it is important that Latino families participate in the community. “It is important because we have children, and I also think that our opinion is important because our children grow up here.” Lucia, just as Felicia, saw children and youth as the foremost reason services are needed for the Latino community. She worried about families with smaller children because she thought it is likely that the younger the children, the less English the parents are able to speak. She said it is impossible for the school to communicate with the parents and vice versa. The parents cannot write notes to the school in English and the school cannot write notes back in Spanish. Lucia’s concerns are in direct contradiction with current anti-immigrant rhetoric which holds that Latinos don’t want to learn English and don’t want to integrate into the community (Federation for American Immigration Reform: http://www.fairus.org/, Colorado Alliance for Immigration Reform: http://www.cairco.org/). Indeed all of the Latina interviewees expressed the same level of concern for their own and their children’s English language skills, and they wanted to participate in community activities.

As in Felicia’s family, Lucia’s family all works with the exception of her seven year-old son. The older kids have after school jobs, and Lucia was sad because she cannot get a job better than the janitorial position. She wished for adult classes so that she could get better work. “We cannot get better jobs because even though I understand English I have no schooling and I understand that the places I can work are limited, even though I wish I could.” Lucia found the small town atmosphere an advantage for raising children because it is safe and she knows where they are all of the time. When asked about the disadvantages of living in the area she stated: “We cannot communicate with more people, that we do not have the opportunity to be more involved with more people because of the language problem. I would like to be more involved, but also there are people around here who are not willing to work across the language barrier, and who do not want to associate with us.”
When I asked her if she would like to be involved with community activities she said: “Of course. Many of the people who live here are farmers and they think they should only hang with each others and not with the Latinos. I don’t feel that way because I speak with everyone, I don’t care what nationality they are.” I asked her if she thought it was class or race that drives the divide and she responded by telling me: “Mostly class and maybe a little race. There is a big divide here between the rich and poor. There are deep class differences. I live here, but most of the wealthy people are farmers. They think we should not be here, and we feel vulnerable because we do not come from the big farmer families, we do not have that last name. This is really the one disadvantage of living here. It is a disadvantage for poor families and for Latinos to live in a small town when we do not have high social status.”

I asked if the Latino community is tightly knit and she explained that since everyone comes from different areas of Latin America, it can be hard to achieve coherence some times, but she thought the bigger barrier to cohesion was the amount of hours that members of her community work. She would like to have a little more personal time for relations with others, not just Latinos, and to spend with her family. She missed fresh foods, and complained about the local Dari-Mart because it never has what she considers fresh produce. She proudly showed me her vegetable garden between the barn and the house. Lucia told me the same thing Felicia did about the needs of Latinos living in the apartments. She said her friends long for a place to grow vegetables, and that if there were transportation to the Community Center they would use some of the land there to grow vegetables for the whole apartment complex. She did hear about facility rental at the Community Center and voluntarily told me how good it would be for quinceañeras and fiestas, but she said few members of the Latino community know about it because there are no notices in Spanish about it. She thought there was someone at the center who was teaching English classes but the family only has one car, which her husband has to use to go to work.

When we discussed English classes she explained that just one class might not work because of all the different levels of English comprehension in the Latino
community. She understood that it would be hard to do because: “There are not enough of us to create many classes, I understand there are not enough of us to divide into different classes because not enough people get involved. But there are many of us around. We have a large community but few people get involved.” I asked if more people would get involved if the community center printed posters in Spanish, and she told me that it would be a very good idea. “But I think that a majority of the women who would like to take classes, they don’t drive. It would be good to have transportation to the classes because women would like to take classes.” She went on to tell me about other things at the community center she was aware of and would like to use. She considered the pre-school program “necessary” in her words. “I wanted to put my son in the program, but I could not because I am always working, I could not volunteer. I work five days a week 2-10 pm, and an additional three days a week at another job from 7 am to 1:30 pm. Transportation to the center is very important so people can use it. Many of us do not drive, even when we learn it is hard to get a license.”

5.3.1.3 Maria

As we spoke an old pickup truck lurched into the driveway and went past the house to another old barn at the back of the property. I learned that there is another Latino/a family renting a space in the barn because they cannot afford an apartment in Monroe. Lucia wanted me to include them in my research so she trotted off down the driveway to fetch the young mother, Maria, who came into the house with her son, age five. Maria was hugely pregnant with her second child. The family had just returned from an emergency doctor visit because the boy had strep throat. Maria explained that they usually used the low-cost clinic in Monroe, but they could not wait for clinic day because the child was so ill, so they went to Immediate Care in Junction City. Maria had to find a friend to take her because her husband was at work, and they only own one vehicle. Maria told me she had never driven before and she would not be able to get a driver’s license even if she learned. Maria is in her late 20s, she has lived in the Monroe area for
one year. Her husband works with a logging outfit in the Coast Range, not far from Monroe. She has been in the United States for eleven years total.

I looked back at the barn and wondered how the family is coping. From the outside it looked uninhabitable, but Lucia told me there are some rooms suitable for residency in it. Maria and her husband send money to their families in Mexico, as do all of the Latinas I interviewed. I asked Maria about her perceptions of the community and what she thought would improve her life in the area. Unsurprisingly, children and transportation featured prominently. She complained that there is no bus, so when the family needs groceries or other services, she has to wait for her husband to have time to drive them. She shops at Winco in Eugene, to save money, since it is more economical to take one or two trips a month to do the majority of the family’s shopping. Maria wished she had a garden, and she had the same complaint that Lucia and Felicia did regarding the produce at Dari-Mart. Maria had also heard about the Community Center through word of mouth, and she thought a community garden would be great. She thought it would give a chance for Latinos to meet other community members. She wanted to show people in the area that the Latino community is just like the Anglo community, and she thought that working side by side outdoors would be a good way to do that.

Maria told me that the advantage to living in South Benton County is the small community, which makes it a good place to raise kids. But she said she was not involved in many activities, even with the Latino community because she cannot drive and she is not in town (the property is about four miles from Monroe). When I asked her what she would like to see at the community center, she told me in addition to a community garden she would like to use the kitchen there. She has seen other women can vegetables, and she wants to learn how to do it. “Canning is hard. It would be good to do it with others.” Maria complained that there is nothing to do for the kids in the area: “No place for the kids to play, like a play park, it is important for the kids to have a place to play. Like the Boys and Girls Club. We need a place to bring our children. I would like to work if I had day care.” Maria expressed surprise that I was interested in what the Latino community needs. I made sure not to raise false hopes by offering an explanation of the purpose of
my research, but I told both families that I will present their voices and needs to the
community center board as it attempts to tailor services to the community. She ended the
interview by saying: “Thank you for coming to see us, we will help you any time and
way we can.” Then she headed back to the barn to put her child to rest.

5.3.1.4 Laura: A Latina Youth

Lucia’s daughter Laura, who is about to graduate from high school joined the
conversation to offer her opinions and experiences. Laura told me that she and her mother
are always trying to help people, but there are barriers, particularly transportation
barriers. Laura had worked with a short-lived parenting program for Latino mothers
based at the high school, and a computer program for the Hispanic community at the
grade school. She was dismayed that the pre-school program at the Alpine Community
Center did not have any Latino/a kids in it. Laura volunteered to watch the children
during the parenting class, but the parents could not seem to focus on the class because:
“It was hard for anyone to learn while the kids were running around in the same area. We
could not get the parents to concentrate, even when we told them we were watching the
kids.” Laura also volunteered for a study hall after school for the Spanish speaking kids.
They worked with the old remedial learning teacher, but when he left, it faded.

We need to do something like that again because the Hispanic kids, we can’t go
home and ask for help because our parents do not have the skills to help us. When
I first started in school it took me a long time just to translate the instructions for
my homework so I could figure out what I was supposed to do. My parents could
not help me. My mom and I would sit with the dictionary to figure out the
directions. As classes get more advanced it is hard. We need a study hall just for
us. We need a place to hang, to help with homework, to use computers, a kid
center like the Boys and Girls Club. I want to help get something like that
together, I am like my mom. If you need a group of kids, I can get them together
to help.

5.3.2 Low Income Anglo Families

According to figures obtained from the United States Census Bureau for 2004, the
last available year, Benton County, Oregon has 9,304 people of all ages in poverty, or
12.5 percent of the population. Of that percentage 13 percent of all children in Benton
County live under the federal poverty level, and private, non-farm employment decreased 2.6 percent between 2000 and 2005 (US Census Bureau 2008).

5.3.2.1 Jody

Younger low income Caucasian residents shared many concerns with the Latino/a community, with childcare and youth services prominent. I interviewed a low income family which is also involved in the local faith-based community at the Bellfountain Church. The father works as a teacher in Philomath, and the mother was working at the private, faith-based iteration of Bellfountain School until the school closed due to lack of funds. As I arrived at the turn of the century farm house at the end of a dirt road in rural Alpine, the father and oldest son, aged 12, were headed out to hunt. Deer season was almost over, the family had not yet bagged their deer, and this was the son’s first hunt as a participant. Father and son excused themselves and drove off in their truck, rifles safely stowed behind the seat. I later learned the hunt was successful. The family has lived in South Benton County for nineteen years, but Jody’s husband’s family has been in the area for at least two generations.

With three children and a mortgage, the family must use creative means of subsistence. Jody, who is 39 years old, showed me around her home, which the family has been renovating for the last eleven years, bit by bit. Jody was proud of the latest remodeling endeavor, her kitchen. The walls are wainscoted, painted light olive green, with floral wall paper above. The room is light and airy, with a mud room leading to her husband’s health department certified butcher shop. Her husband is an avid hunter who provides most of the meat for the family. Beef is provided through an agreement among neighbors, each of which allow the steer to graze on their property in turn, and then share the meat at butcher time. Jody’s husband constructed a stainless steel butcher shop and meat locker in a shed adjacent to the garage, and sought certification to dress and butcher game, as well as to make sausage. The sausage making endeavor keeps the entire family busy during the summer, when they make venison, beef, and local pork sausage to sell from a small vending trailer at local fairs. The family donates a portion of the proceeds to
their church and uses the remainder of the profit to augment the husband’s income, which ceases during the summer months.

The family also tends a vegetable garden on their property. They glean fruit from trees and bushes in neighbor’s yards and family member’s properties, particularly apples, pears, and blackberries, which they preserve for winter and use along with a variety of vegetables. Jody told me the only things they buy from the store are flour, sugar, milk, baking ingredients, sundries, and the occasional treat. Parents of the couple have larger vegetable plots and they provide vegetables that the couple do not grow themselves, such as green beans in quantity. As we talked Jody was in constant motion, feeding the youngest child, putting the other son to work on his lessons (the children are now home schooled), and working in the kitchen on dinner preparation. The children are 12, 10, and eight years old. Jody explained the butcher shop, which is not licensed for slaughter, but which is set up to dress and butcher game. She told me what a great investment the butcher shop was because they can also butcher their own meat, and the summertime sausage vending business allows them to survive when they have no other income. We talked about their means of subsistence, and Jody relayed this summer’s tragedy: the freezer died and no one realized it for a few days, so they lost all of their stored meat. This tale lends urgency to the hunting endeavor. Jody has had to buy meat from local producers over the last month, and the family budget was strained.

Jody explained that in addition to applesauce and other means of fruit preservation, the family stores fruit and root vegetables in the old garage which is just the right temperature to keep the produce from freezing in winter. Last year her husband and his uncles successfully went elk hunting, so the family also made a big batch of smoked summer sausage which survived the freezer disaster. But they get tired of sausage, since the whole family worked for days on end to make it for summer sales. They go to Winco market in Corvallis once a month for necessities.

When asked about her perceptions of the community, Jody said that it is a beautiful place to live, with places for the kids to explore, and geographical proximity with parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. They know everyone in the
area, and feel quite comfortable in the community. The church community is like family for them, and it has been hard to lose the faith-based school, though the church community is still strong. Transportation costs were the only disadvantage that Jody could think of when queried.

The kids are involved in various community activities, such as horse-back riding at the neighbors’, sports, and the occasional dance class in Junction City for the youngest child, a girl. The family was donating labor at high school football games by cooking for fundraisers, working as volunteers at the food bank, and by participating in food drives. It seemed that the parents urged the children to engage in community service on a regular basis. Jody told me the only thing they have done at the community center is use the recycling center, but her husband’s family had rented it for family activities, such as an Easter party which was too big to have in anyone’s house. Jody recounted how nice the community center was with a big place where all the family children could play, and the big kitchen. Jody’s reason for not utilizing the center on a regular basis is time-oriented. The center’s offerings are all at hours that are too hard for the family to get there. Her husband comes home in the evening, and then there is dinner, and by that time everyone is tired. She would like to go to some of the classes, such as exercise classes, and a quilting group that meets at the center. They do go to the Holiday Fair at the center each year. The family lives close to the Alpine Community Center, so transportation is not an issue for them.

I asked Jody if there is anything the Community Center could offer that would draw the family to use it, and she said considering her time constraints, the only draw would be youth activities. She would be interested in things that would augment home-schooling educational programs. There are other religious families in the same situation now that their school has closed. She also thought some programs for elderly residents would be useful. When I asked what she thinks would be useful for the entire South Benton County community, she said the main draw would be after-school youth programs. She also remarked that it is hard for seniors to have to go to Monroe for programs.
She mused on the definition of South Benton County community: “Even though it seems like all one community, really Monroe is kind of its own little community, and Bellfountain and Alpine, in some ways. In some ways we seem very far from Monroe.” She went on to tell me about an organization the church group formed called “Helping Hands”. The group goes out once a month on a Saturday morning to a person’s home, usually a widow, widower, or single mother. The members ask the resident what they need done around the property, they make a long-term plan of needs, and they work at it each Saturday morning. They have cut and split wood, cleared brush, and similar chores. They ask people in the community if they know of anyone who needs help. They hope to assist people who otherwise “would fall between the cracks” as Jody put it.

As I prepared to leave, Jody came out to tell me one more community need came to mind, and she wanted to get it on the record. She was thinking about a friend of hers who used to do childcare, but quit a few months ago. She realized that many of the people who did childcare have quit for one reason or another, and she saw many of her friends are having trouble. Jody occasionally agrees to do it in order to earn extra money, but she is unwilling to start a business with its concomitant licensing requirements. She enumerated a dozen names of women who are struggling to work who cannot find affordable, or any child care at all. “People are really desperately looking for it. I have been asked a number of times.” As I drove away, the afternoon light was dappled by a stand of timber on the west side of the road, and the current steer, nicknamed “MacDonald’s”, innocently chewed its cud of weedy grasses, unaware of its future as hamburger.

### 5.3.2.2 Rosie and Her Family

The strategies that Jody’s family uses to subsist are typical of all the low income Anglo South Benton County residents I interviewed. Rosie is Jane’s mother. Jane’s comments are in the above section on youth and children, along with a description of Rosie’s house. The day I arrived to interview Rosie, the widow was canning venison stew. The ingredients came from her son-in-law, who provided the meat, tomatoes and
onions. The kitchen was taken over by the canning endeavor, with a big pot of stew, and two dozen or so quart jars of stew already canned and cooling, a pot full of jars in process, and more jars ready to fill on another counter. She was preparing three dozen quart jars. On another visit I found Rosie, Jane and her sister, along with Jane’s two nieces, busily peeling windfall apples, cooking them down and canning the resulting applesauce. It was a marvel to see them all working together in the tiny Monroe kitchen, which is barely seven feet wide, including cabinets. The windows were dripping condensation and Rosie excused herself to go turn on the heat pump which was purchased and installed with a no-interest, low-income house improvement loan.

The first interview was with Rosie in early October. The larger family, including Rosie, Jane, Jane’s sister Joyce, and Rosie’s two granddaughters, had recently finished putting up jars of tomatoes, green beans, peaches, salsa, pickles, elk, venison, tuna, and boar meat, stew, jams, tomato sauce, apple sauce, and apple butter. Rosie and I took a walk through the pantry in the garage, where she told me where all of the items came from. All of the meats came from game her son-in-law hunted, and the tuna was bought off the dock in Newport. There was a shelf on the other side of the garage filled with commercially canned goods which came from the food bank in Monroe. The food bank also provided fresh produce in season from surplus other gardeners bring in.

Rosie explained the system her extended family uses to supply itself with food. Her youngest daughter, Joyce lives on a farm with her husband. They receive free rent because her husband works on the farm as a foreman. They have a large vegetable plot which provides almost all of the vegetables for Joyce and her husband, their four children, her mother Rosie, and her sister Jane. In return for produce, Jane and Rosie do all of the food preservation and canning for the entire family at their house in Monroe. Rosie also is the caretaker for her son-in-law’s mother, and she receives a stipend from the State of Oregon for doing so.

I asked Rosie about the rows of canned peaches. Her daughter and granddaughters went to an orchard and picked them. They canned 150 pounds of peaches that summer. It took Rosie and Jane all day to produce the 120 pints of finished product. Later that day
they did the prep-work for the salsa, which they canned the next day. The garage is lined with heavy wooden shelves which run along two plaster and lath walls. The walls are thick and the room is very chilly. The garage leaks in every corner. I realized that the hundreds of jars in the garage are just a portion of the overall labor, since the majority of preserved food goes to her daughter’s house. Rosie said that most of the fruit they can comes from windfalls gleaned from trees in the area. They go and ask property owners if they can collect fallen apples and pears. The peaches and cherries come from a local u-pick orchard. Joyce and her husband’s biological daughters aged thirteen and fourteen, get their own deer tags, so along with their father’s tag, the family is allowed to take at least three deer a year. Their father also takes bow-hunting tags, which increases the hunts the family can engage in. Both girls have already shot their deer this year. Their other two siblings were adopted by Joyce and her husband after their mother lost them due to repeated arrests for drug use and sales. Joyce and her husband fought to legally adopt the other two children for years and were finally successful this year. Joyce, who arrived during the interview, told me the girls even learned how to field dress their own deer. Joyce also provides the family with eggs from her own chickens.

Rosie, who has lived in South Benton County for forty years, loves the area because it is beautiful and the people are friendly. Having lived in rural Alaska with her husband, she thinks that Monroe is a good location because it is close to both Corvallis and Eugene, but it is now getting harder for her to drive. She has had to confine her driving to daytime because her night vision is faltering. In addition to the part-time caretaking position she has, she also creates earrings, crocheted afghans, bracelets, and necklaces for sale in Springfield, where she rents a booth at a local craft store. She volunteers at the store once a week in order to fulfill her contract with the seller’s cooperative. She trotted out a stack of crocheted afghans from her bedroom, each of them in a different color scheme, with elaborate roses and leaves three-dimensionally crocheted above the base squares. She has a sewing machine on the table in the middle of the living room, which she uses to do alterations for people. She has sold at the Alpine Community Center Holiday Fair each year, with success. When I asked what services she
would she like to see there, she told me she would like to see a consignment store that runs all year. She thought that would be good because there are many people in the community who make things, such as soaps, lotions, and jewelry. She would be willing to volunteer at such a shop.

I returned for a second interview at the end of October, when the air was starting to chill. The family was busy making apple butter, and we talked about how canning is accomplished in such a small kitchen. Rosie said: “Well, we have someone at the sink, we have someone at the counter. I run the canners, help fill the jars, and wipe them down and put the lids on. I time them and keep that end of the canning going, they pit and peel and put them in jars. If it is pickles, they put the brine over ‘em.” They spend a few weeks in intensive canning over the course of the summer and fall. I asked how they keep the jars from freezing over the winter in the garage, and she said they put a light out there. If the cold is really severe they plug in a little electric heater. She complained that the food bank in Monroe does not have many things they eat, because she has to be careful of her food intake due to health problems. There is a freezer in the garage which is full of corn, squash and zucchini which also were preserved last summer. She stored bread from the gleaners in the freezer also. Her cousin also has a large vegetable garden, so they get produce from her to augment the produce her daughter grows at the farm. She handed me a bag full of ripening tomatoes which they plucked off the plants before a frost and told me to put them in my kitchen to redden them.

The family once lived in Alpine, and owned the Alpine Market in the 1970s. In the early eighties they sold it to Dorothy Brinkerhoff and Sandy Tribble, who remodeled it, brought in bulk bins, and tried to run it as a full service country store until its demise in 2004. The family bought the house in Monroe in 1987. Rosie’s husband died in the late 1990s of Alzheimer’s disease. The costs of care impoverished the already struggling family, and Rosie had to deed her house to the government in return for medical care for her husband. Jane worried that when her mother dies she won’t have any where to go because the government will legally be able to sell the home for medical costs7.
Rosie talked about her history of community involvement while her children were young. She used to attend PTA meetings, and other community activities, and she wistfully wished she still could. She cannot drive at night, and said that if the community center had some transportation for the seniors, she knows people, including herself, that would love to go out there and do things. She was interested in computer classes as well as retail opportunity.

Rosie reminisced about the “old days” in Alpine:

When the lights would go out, everyone would come to the store and sit by the heater because a lot of them did not have heat. People were just, I don’t know, they were just really outgoing and do things for you, and it was a good experience. I’ve always liked the community and the people, and all of our kids went to school at Alpine, all three of them. There was a lot of things went on there when they were in school, and we did a lot at the school.

Rosie opined that other people in Monroe would use the Community Center if there were transportation because: “This community here is mostly made of older people, and we are not what we used to be, and we have to quit some of the things we used to do because we just can’t get around and drive.” She would like to volunteer at the Community Center if she could teach a class in bead-working to local youth.

She also worried that people out in Alpine who cannot get to the food bank in Monroe are going hungry, and she thought the Community Center should use a little space to store some food for low income residents. I asked Rosie if there was anything else she would like to say and she ended with: “All I can say is I’ve had a good life in the area and I’ve enjoyed living here.”

5.3.2.3 Other Examples

A sampling of other interviews with Anglo low income residents turned up much of the same. All informants used various subsistence strategies, similar to those described above. Hunting, canning, and local food provision were common. One single mother grew her own vegetables, purchased game from local hunters, and eggs from friends with chickens. She gathered mushrooms and berries on BLM land, and gained permission to harvest her own firewood from local timber lots. She thought one of the most important
services the Community Center provided were the library and computer lab because it gave her the opportunity to connect with the outside world and provided a place to socialize. She attended all of the potlucks at the center, which was within walking distance.

Another low income member of the faith-based community and the mother of four children, wanted to see the Center offer programs and educational opportunities for her children. She stated: “I think we lose out on some opportunities being in a small community. There’s not some of the programs that you can find in bigger cities, and educational opportunities might be harder to come by.” I asked her about other offerings that might draw her to the center and she cited the Holiday Fair as one draw as well as the re-sale shop. She also brought her kids there for pizza parties, sleepovers, and potlucks. She herself was interested in specialty cooking classes, such as Dutch oven cooking.

5.4 Views, Visions, and Uses

In the course of interviews users and volunteers expressed their visions for the center and by proxy for the community. Though non-users had needs they thought the center should fulfill, volunteers and users had visions for the Center beyond that of a provision mechanism. They saw the Center as a place to animate the social life of the community. Community Center Board members had a coherent vision of the center, but residents also had their visions. The following interviews were chosen for their articulation of vision. The informants were thoughtful about the challenges and opportunities they saw for the project. The interviewees had a track record of community involvement and were engaged with the Community Center Board’s planning process.

5.4.1 Walter’s Vision

The first person I interviewed regarding his vision for the Center was Walter, a native of South Benton County who left to work in California. He returned many years later when he retired. He and his wife were active in their northern California community. They worked on the local library there, and on other community endeavors.
Walter is descended from an original settler family in the area. He gained a degree in agricultural forestry at Oregon State University in the 1960s, moved to rural California, and returned to buy his 300 acre property in South Benton County twelve years ago. He still owns another home in California and commutes a few times a year. Walter is engaged in wetland and oak land restoration on his property, which is a demonstration project. His vision is that of a self-sustaining green community, with local food production, local water systems, a community center, and environmentally sound power generation. He is engaged in creating this system on his own property and thinks the entire community can achieve the same thing. He and his wife use the Community Center, availing themselves of its varied offerings on a regular basis. We met at the Community Center before one of the potlucks.

Walter thought that a viable Community Center would raise the worth of the community both economically and socially. But he had this to say: "When I attend planning meetings I get the sense that there is no real leadership to push the project. I observed, no one knows, what this community really is. The dynamic I see is a community that is vibrant but subdued." He went on to say that with two universities and a surprisingly diverse population he saw the potential for a sustainable community. "What do you want to be in 20 years? The people can look forward to create a new paradigm. This community does not have to be a bedroom community; it can stand on its own." Walter thought that things might have been more active in the past when the community was different, but he said: "You can’t re-create the past; you have to look at the people that are moving in now, and think what they want 24 years from now. You have to serve the 21st century community."

5.4.2 Jack: Pessimist but Still Activist

I interviewed a retired couple who have lived close to the Alpine School since 1990 and in Benton County since 1972. Jack and Edith, age 66 and 70, live in a house built in the early 1900’s. It is a tiny cottage with a big yard shaded by mature evergreen trees which must have been planted when the house was built. Though the couple use the Center and volunteer, Jack is pessimistic regarding the viability of the Community Center
project. He has been involved in the South Benton County community since he moved there in 1972.

Jack perceived a decline in community involvement. I asked him what he thought the community needed. He thought people needed a place to hang out, such as a coffee shop or similar gathering place. That was what the Alpine Market used to be but: “It went down the tube because no one was supporting it.” He went on: “Once the school was gone and people stopped coming for a specific reason, everything else went away. Unfortunately that’s the nature of it. The folks in Monroe, they go to downtown Monroe, why would they come over here?” Jack, who once worked as a director at the Boys and Girls Club in Pasadena, California, thought the only way to draw people would be to offer programs that would draw teenagers, but he was skeptical that the Community Center could provide something like that without the Boys and Girls Club as a partner. He talked about the workout room at the center, which he said did not attract enough users even though it and other offerings were advertised.

In spite of his pessimism during the interview, Jack sought to find things that would draw people to the center. He thought the kitchen was the best hope to bring people in because: “It is already there, and it is needed.” He suggested using it as a commercial kitchen, or a place where groups could preserve food. Later in the interview Jack talked about the volunteer work he does for the Center. He mows the front yard, clears the interior courtyard of weeds, and volunteers for fundraising activities. For a while he ran the exercise room, but no one showed up so he stopped. He thought the Center was a wonderful idea, but: “I think it is much too large of a project for this community to continually finance and continually maintain. There just aren’t the people out here to support it. They just aren’t here, or at least they aren’t using it. Look at the potlucks; you have been to several of them. It’s the same people over and over, and that base isn’t that large.”
Chapter 6 Findings: The Alpine Community Center Board

6.1 The Role of the Alpine Community Center Board

The members of the Alpine Community Center Board are at the center of the community endeavor. A brief biography for each is included in the prior section on history and description of the community. Each of the Board members has dedicated his or her efforts toward community improvement through a variety of actions. Of the five women and one man on the board, two of them are employed in community health and wellness professions by Benton County, one was instrumental in bringing Monroe into the Benton County Library system, one is a local business owner, one is the Benton County director of Public Works, and one is a private consultant. All of them are active in many community activities such as teen programs, Lion’s Club, food drives, and other types of volunteering. I conducted three in depth-interviews with one Board member, one interview with another Board member, and I attended five Board meetings and four meetings between the Board and other engaged community members. I also attended and participated in public presentations by the Board to the community, and Transition Team meetings (please see section 6.3.1).

It is interesting to note that the majority of Board members and volunteers are female. Of further interest is the large proportion of so-called “Baby Boomers” involved in the project. Out of six Board members three of them were born during Baby Boomer era, and out of eighteen Transition Team volunteers, ten of them also belong to that demographic.

My personal relationships with some Board members are described in the section on methodology. These personal relationships helped me to understand the goals and expectations of the Board, and the interactions between the Board and other community members. I understood the time constraints some Board members operated under as they tried to fit Board duties into their schedules, and the sacrifices they made as they worked for their community. I also knew the history of interpersonal conflicts between some
board members and community members, as well as the history of beneficial relationships between Board and community members. This knowledge was strategic as I sought informants and was of help as I made recommendations to the Board.

6.1.1 The Alpine Community Center Board of Directors

The current Board roster includes six individuals, five females and one male. The roster has changed slightly from the Board composition at the start of this project. Originally there were seven board members. Three of the original Board members left the board and two new people were added.

- Dorothy Brinkerhoff and her husband Gary own a water pump business. Dorothy is 53 years old and a 26 year resident of the area. She has been involved in community projects since she and her husband arrived in Alpine. They live in a comfortable home in the center of Alpine. Dorothy and her husband moved to Alpine from San Francisco, California. They are active in the Lion’s Club and other charitable organizations, and have worked on the Community Center Project since it began in the early 1980s. They have one son in graduate school, and a very loud dog. Dorothy and Gary live in the center of Alpine proper on Webster Street. Dorothy is one of the original Alpine Community Center Board Members.

- Evelyn Lee is in her fifties. She is single and works as a private consultant from her home. She lives on the outskirts of Alpine, up a steep road in a wooded area. Evelyn moved to Alpine seventeen years ago, and became involved with the Community Center project when the school closed.

- Dena Elliott lives in Monroe. She is a lifetime resident. Dena was instrumental in adding the independent Monroe Library to the Benton County Library system when she was the first librarian in Monroe. She is now retired and is the co-chair of the South Benton Library Project.

- Patty Parsons is a health promotion specialist for chronic disease at the Benton County Health Department. Patty came to live in Alpine as a young woman about thirty years ago with her parents who moved from California to Alpine to start a Christmas tree business. Patty has been very active with the Health Department
for the benefit of Benton County Communities. She initiated a childhood obesity prevention program and worked to implement safety measures in the county for pedestrians and bicyclists. She is also active in other aspects of prevention, including the Tobacco Free Advisory Group and other youth outreach projects. Patty lives on the outskirts of Alpine. Her son went to Alpine School along with Dorothy Brinkerhoff’s son and my daughter.

- Roger Ervin, the sole male Board member, is the Director of Benton County Public Works Department. He is also on the South Benton County Enhancement Board. Among other things, Roger is known for his sensitivity to the needs of bicyclists. As public works director he ensures that when county roads are worked on, bicycle lanes are expanded whenever possible. Roger is active in other community activities such as the annual bicycle run put on by the Alpine Community Center. Roger moved to Junction City so that his sons could attend Junction City High School.

- Joyce Long is in her forties. She has two children of high school age. She lives at the border of Bellfountain and Alpine. Joyce works for the Department of Fish and Wildlife at the Finley Wildlife Refuge. She is an IT specialist and also works in purchasing. Joyce formed the “Dragon Focus” group at Monroe High School when she learned there were no PTA or other parent’s association groups at the high school. She also formed “Teens in Action”, a youth group at the high school which engages in health promotion activities and puts on dances and other events. Teens in Action now uses the Alpine Community Center as a center of activities, in addition to their activities at the high school.

6.1.2 Professionalism

Board members all took their duties to the Board, the Center, and the community seriously and professionally. Professionalism is defined as a person or entity exhibiting impressive competence in a particular activity (wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn). As a whole, the Alpine Community Center Board conducts itself in an effective, professional manner. Members thoroughly research funding opportunities, and attend conferences
geared toward community revitalization. Presentations on the part of the Board to the public and other agencies are complete with hand-outs, Power Point presentations, and ready answers to a variety of questions. The Board members are not shy about donating their time and personal resources toward the Community Center Project.

The professionalism of the Community Center Board can be read in the September 26 2005, minutes of a joint meeting between the Alpine Community Center Board (then known as the South Benton County Community Center Board), and the Monroe School Board. The Community Center Board members gave a tour of the facilities to the School Board, and then went on to present the School Board with the results of an architectural consultation the Community Center Board obtained with the proceeds of a grant written for that purpose. At this meeting the Community Center Board also presented the School Board with a financial plan and a long term facility plan for the Center. The Community Center Board was prepared with a Fire Marshal’s report, and a report of volunteer work done to improve the structure and the grounds. The Community Center Board negotiated a deal with the School Board regarding heating oil and furnace maintenance, and it discussed a change in liability insurance coverage. The main thrust of the meeting was to hammer out an agreement with the School Board regarding long term leasing, and opportunities for collaboration between the School District and the Community Center Board, with the suggestion that the Community Center may be able to provide additional services to the School District’s student population, such as after-school programs and summer lunch programs (Minutes SBCC 9/26/05).

I witnessed another example of the Board’s professionalism at a February 16 2007, joint meeting between the Board and the South Benton County community. The Community Center Board was prepared with electronic visual presentations and printed hand-outs. A full report was given to all attendees regarding finances, fund-raising, progress, and all other facets of Community Center operation and administration.
6.2 Interviews with Two Board Members

My interactions with the entire Community Center Board were professional and cordial. I attended many Board meetings, and had sporadic interactions with various Board members regarding issues of particular interest to them, such as outreach methods, fundraising, surveys, the preschool, and other Center offerings. Two Board members agreed to participate in my thesis research independent of our other modes of association. One of them was quite optimistic and inclusive, and the other Board member was committed to the project, but exclusionary regarding the inclusion of the entire community into the planning process and the Center’s programs.

6.2.1 Dorothy: An Optimist

Dorothy Brinkerhoff consented to three interviews over the span of my research project. In addition to the interviews, we communicated a number of times, as she was forthcoming with updates on the progress of the Community Center Project. The first interview was in response to the general questionnaire which was the foundation for all of the interviews. In later interviews Dorothy talked about the history of the Center, her visions for the Center’s future, and about the obstacles and successes the Board was encountering during the process of maintaining the Center. During this time span, many things happened with the project. I presented a preliminary needs assessment to the Board, which they began to half-heartedly integrate into their planning process, and the Board was faced with the possibility it might lose the facility when the School Board announced it was putting the property up for sale. The Board began to take some proactive steps as preliminaries to purchasing the building, but the future was uncertain.

6.2.1.1 Interview 1: The Beginning

Though this interview was based on the general questionnaire, Dorothy’s life revolves around her community service and her relationship with the Community Center project. Dorothy engages in other volunteer activities and organizations, but she could not separate her responses regarding life in the area from her immersion in the project. The Community Center is the common thread in all interviews with her, no matter what the
original topic of conversation was. The project informs her relationships with the community and her perceptions of the quality of life in South Benton County.

Dorothy and her husband moved to Alpine from the San Francisco Bay Area, bought property in 1981 and started their own business. Dorothy is 52 years old and has been involved in the Community Center project since the early 1980s. The couple has a 26 year-old son who is about to graduate with a law degree from a college in Michigan. Dorothy’s residence is a 1995 manufactured home which was placed on the property after the 1920s cottage the family inhabited was finally deemed too broken to fix.

Dorothy and her husband Gary, live in the original Alpine township settlement area which encompasses approximately 1/8 mile of Alpine Road from the old, unused King’s Garage on the east, through the intersection, to the old Alpine School and Park a couple of hundred feet to the west. The north/south boundary of the settlement area runs from one block north of Alpine Road to the houses on the south side of Alpine road, facing the road. There are approximately 26-30 residences in the settlement area. Since the original settlement, a number of homes have been built on Bellfountain Road, between Bellfountain and Alpine. Those homes, though at times closely set, have a minimum of five acres, and are considered rural Alpine, rather than “town” Alpine. There are also residences along Alpine Road to the east of the town itself which are considered rural Alpine, as well as many residences in the hills to the west of town.

Dorothy has set one room aside as a home office, and the house was simply and comfortably furnished. There were two, quite large reddish-yellow dogs barking at me as I came through the door for the initial interview. When I sat on the couch the younger of the dogs decided he needed love from me and continued to alternatively bark in my ear and push on me for pets. During the interview the dogs barked intermittently at full volume, until Dorothy’s husband gave us fifteen minutes of respite by taking them to the park for a walk. A Community Center meeting was planned for later that evening, so Dorothy put a pan of enchiladas in the oven to warm and we set about putting away groceries her husband had just brought home. Then we sat on the couch and I fended off the dogs as I interviewed her.
Dorothy was convinced that the Community Center project is viable, and she was animated when she discussed what she felt is negative publicity regarding the community and the Center. A number of articles were written in the local Tri County News about the progress of the project, and she critiqued one of them during this first interview. A section of the article dealing with identity struggles the community has experienced since the store and the school closed extracted heated comments from her. She told me the author used the word “ravaged” to describe the community after the closures, and she described the article as a “bunch of crap”, but there is a part of the article she does agree with. She reads out loud: “. . . the shock of the school and store closures mobilized a collection of active community members. . .“. She agreed, saying that it was the school closure that got them started in trying to take over the school as a community center.

When asked what she liked about the area, Dorothy gave the same answer that 100 percent of interviewees have: the area has natural beauty and the community is welcoming. "I love living in South Benton County. It is quality of life stuff to have beauty around you all of the time.” In agreement with other interviewees whom are parents, Dorothy thought it was a good place to raise children. She saw the various communities as a whole: “I really like my neighbors, and by my neighbors I don’t just mean the people on this street, but some people from Monroe, and other Alpine people.” She went on to say that South Benton County was a great place to raise her only son, but she would have liked to provide him with more ethnic diversity. Dorothy, born and raised in San Francisco, thought this was a problem for kids who will one day have to learn to work with people of various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, but she felt the problem was improving because there is a growing Hispanic population in the area which is becoming involved in the community and buying property. She stated: “They are not just marginalized farm workers, but they are setting down roots.” She is taking Spanish in Corvallis to brush up because she wants to be able to communicate with the Latino population.
6.2.1.2 Interview2: Hopes and Visions

During the second interview Dorothy and I spoke about her hopes for the Center and the direction the Board was taking in order to further the project. In addition to Dorothy’s duties as a board member, she volunteers at the Community Center once a week as librarian and retail shop staffer, and her husband staffs the recycling center. Dorothy also attends the Center’s aerobics classes. Since I had recently presented the Board with a preliminary needs assessment, I asked her about plans to expand the Center’s offerings in order to bring in a broader segment of the population.

Along with a majority of other interviewees, she thought that the Monroe School only provides sports after school hours and she wanted to see some after school programs for kids. She also wanted to see a senior nutrition program at the center. When the Board pursued the idea, it found a long-standing senior nutrition program in Monroe. The Community Center Board approached the Monroe program with an offer of cheaper space, but the nutrition program organizers felt it was too far to go. Monroe was seen as a viable central location for the nutrition program, and the organizers were unwilling to move it. This led to a discussion about the need for transportation to the Community Center. Dorothy told me about a Rural Development conference she attended with some other Board members. At the conference the Board members learned that other rural communities had developed transportation systems, so Dorothy was inspired to seek assistance from the local school bus company to replicate that success.

Dorothy’s vision for the Center included after school programs, art and other self actualization classes, such as basket making, and use of the Center as a rental facility for conferences. She told me the Board was working on grant applications to hire a director who could coordinate programs, get volunteers to help lead things, and expand access to the center. Dorothy talked about current Center offerings such as wireless access and computer classes, but wistfully admitted that the volunteer base was not large enough to support hoped-for programs. Dorothy hoped that once the Center was purchased by the community, renovation could be done on a volunteer basis, something the School District was not able to allow. She was quite optimistic regarding the capacity of the community
to work on renovations, and she thought that once the building was purchased it would be easier to apply for grants toward major capital improvements, since the Center would be owned by a non-profit community outreach organization.

Dorothy expanded on the vision she and other Board members had for the Center. She thought there was a need for senior services, such as classes geared toward seniors, and that the Board and Community Center were not sufficiently engaged with the Latino community through such needed offerings as ESL classes, and joint parent/child activities. Drama classes and a theater program for youth and adults were also brought up as possible activities.

6.2.1.3 Interview 3: Progress

Our third interview is in Dorothy’s front yard. By now the Monroe School Board has an offer for the building, but School Board members express the hope that the Community Center Board will get it together to buy the facility instead. This interview is far-ranging. Dorothy talks about the current state of the project, the history of the Center and the future of the Community Center.

The Big Challenge Facing the Community Center

The tall pines on Dorothy’s street were misted by October rain, and we drew our jackets around us for warmth. I could not negotiate her steps due to an injury I sustained in August, so we were confined to the garden area. We discussed the current challenge facing the Community Center project and Dorothy’s perceptions of the community. The Monroe School Board had received an offer on the school property, and set a deadline of April 1 2008, for the Board to negotiate the purchase of the property. If the School Board and the Community Center Board failed to come up with a mutually agreeable contract by that date, the School Board would put the property on the open market the following day. The Community Center Board met a few days prior and brought up the same questions that had been discussed eight months before at the community meeting: “Do we really want to own this property, and can the community sustain us owning this property?”
The Board was still looking into the possibility of a land swap with the Garden Club. The Community Center Board decided to send the School Board a letter advising it that a subcommittee from the Community Center Board should meet with a subcommittee of the School Board to see if an agreement can be made to purchase the property via a low-interest, long term loan. A potluck was planned for November 16, 2008, to let people know what was happening with their Center, to find out what they did support and what they wanted. Dorothy suggested a survey to be handed out at the Holiday Fair planned for November tenth, which would ask if the community was in favor of purchasing the Center. I agreed to help assess support at the fair, so there would be some idea of community support at the November 16th potluck. Dorothy explained that it was not up to the Board to decide whether to move forward. It was up to the community. She told me: “We just represent the community.”

The Community Center had a lease with the School Board that ran through June of 2008. Dorothy noted that the Community Center Board estimated the Center, just as it was, would cost approximately $20,000 dollars a year to operate, as that is what the School Board was spending before the Community Center took over the buildings. Dorothy was ambivalent. She questioned the community’s ability to afford the property since the School Board had been subsidizing it up to this time, but in the same sentence she talked about the Board’s focus on a business plan for self sufficiency. The Board wanted to avoid relying on grants, but Dorothy also said: “If we own it, we are now in a position to get grants up the wazoo that we have been told are available for rural communities.”

**Optimism, Lightly Tempered by Reality**

Dorothy had lost none of her optimism regarding the community and the project in spite of the uncertain status of the facility. Her optimism was evident in at least three other board members I spoke with during this period. The Board’s success with their first fundraising effort targeted at property owners led her to believe in continued financial support from the community. She and another Board member planned to once again attend the Regards to Rural conference funded by the Rural Development Initiative. The
conference was to be held the following Thursday, and the plan was to network there with other rural development organizations. Dorothy cited a success story she heard at last year’s conference. The rural communities of Dora and Sitcum are known as Dora-Sitcum. The community is in southern Oregon between I-5 and the coast, north of Grants Pass, and has a population of around 250 people combined. At the last conference Dorothy learned that Dora-Sitcum raised $975,000 dollars to build a firehouse and community center. The Dora-Sitcum Board asked each one of the 250 residents to contribute at least a dollar a piece, and the community showed such a level of support that the project then garnered grants. With her typical ambivalence Dorothy told me she thought this could happen in South Benton County, but she was worried that the Monroe Library Project was serving as the community center for South Benton County at this point. Dorothy was not sure if the community could support both projects. Yet she and the other board members were prepared to continue the struggle even if the proposal for purchase fell through, since there was still a possibility of building a center on the park property.

**Alternative Plan for the Preschool**

Dorothy and I discussed my findings regarding the significance of the pre-school and she explained the plan should the pre-school have to move. The empty Bellfountain School had been purchased by the Bellfountain Church. The Church community formed a primary school in the old school building. The school was disbanded because the overhead was higher than the Church community could afford. The Church still owns the school house, and the Alpine Community Center Board approached the Church to see if the Church community would consider leasing school house space to the Community Center Board in order to maintain the pre-school even if the Alpine campus was lost. The Church community agreed. The Alpine Pre-School was at capacity with fourteen students at the time. Dorothy seemed to think that there were more young families moving in the area, a thesis which I could not support or disprove with current census data, and which was refuted by one of the mothers. The Latino/a community was not discussed during this conversation as a possible source of children.
Past and Future

In spite of the Board’s alternative plans Dorothy was worried about the future of the center. Eternally optimistic, she was nevertheless a business person and long term resident of the community. We discussed the history of the Center in the context of a possible return to square one for the project. From the construction of the park shelter in the early eighties to the dormancy of the Community Center Board until the school closure revived the project, community interest in a center waxed and waned. Dorothy wondered how they would keep the programs alive if the school buildings were no longer available. If the community has to wait for a building to be constructed on the park land she said:

The problem there is we go from having a facility now to having a facility in the future—how do you keep your programs alive, how do you keep your momentum alive? But we are committed to keeping that pre-school going, and I know that aerobics class will find a home somewhere, they are a very committed group, and the core people who are getting together for potlucks are somehow going to make that continue to happen as well. So there is something left here, so there is a drive to keep some kind of community thing going. I am optimistic there is a future here, I just don’t know what it will be.

6.2.2 Alternative Vision

In contrast to Dorothy’s inclusive view of the community and the Center as a provider of services to all demographic strata, an interview with another Board member whom I shall call N. provided a somewhat different vision of the center. The interviewee spoke with me at the residence which was situated on a twenty acre lot complete with horses, dogs, and mature woodland. The home is opulently furnished with Asian art works, Japanese furniture, Persian carpets, and wood floors in every room, including the laundry room. N had a few friends over to help with preparations for a gathering to be held at the home later. We informally chatted about the Community Center project and about the Board member’s perceptions of the community.

Unlike Dorothy, N. expressed reservations about including marginal community members into the planning and into the Center itself. When we discussed some of the poorer areas of Alpine, N. described the people living there as “scary”, and expressed the
opinion that the Latino community did not want to participate in center activities by saying: “There is no way to involve them because they just go to the Catholic Church in Monroe for their services and activities.” N. told me there had been no outreach to the Hispanic community, and expressed no interest in my offer to translate outreach posters into Spanish. When we discussed the need for some type of assessment to prove to the Ford Family Foundation and other funders the Center’s capacity, use, and level of community commitment, the Board member was resistant to the idea of a survey, though that was one of the reasons for our meeting. Another party present at times during the interview, spoke at length about past local surveys and their value to no avail. This reaction was not representative of the rest of the Board’s attitude toward inclusion and policy.

6.3 The Board in Action

In November of 2007, the Community Center Board faced its greatest challenge. The Community Center was in danger of losing its campus, and the Board was challenged to seek funds in order to counter a purchase offer received by the Monroe School District from a private individual. In addition to the financial challenge, the Board had to find some place to move the pre-school and other services if its offer was not accepted. Setting aside the failings of the Board to fully engage the entire community, the actions of the Community Center Board to gather experts and engage the community to meet the challenge can provide a general blueprint for community engagement in revitalization projects. Following is an account of the effort to engage the community in the project by calling for volunteers to serve on a Transition Task Force.

6.3.1 The Transition Task Force

The Transition Task Force process provides a look at the interactions between the Board and a portion of the community, as well as the mindset of a Board which is determined to find a way to keep the project afloat. This process also illustrates the lack of outreach to various population segments, since all but one of the Task Force members were Anglo professionals in the middle to upper income brackets.
Once an offer had been made by an outside party for the facility and the Monroe School Board issued the timed ultimatum to the Community Center Board regarding purchase, the Alpine Community Center Board decided to create the Transition Task Force. The Task Force consisted of Community Center Board members, School Board members, and professionals from the South Benton County community. Board members called upon local professionals from many fields including academia, social work, property investment, public works, and consulting. I was one of the people asked to participate in the Task Force.

The first meeting of the Task Force was held on November 11 2007, in the Alpine school cafeteria, with eighteen Community Center Board and general community members present who were asked to volunteer for the task force. At the three Transition Task Force meetings I presented my ongoing findings regarding levels of community support, views of non-users, and perceived need for services during the course of the discussions. I participated as a Task Force member by working with my particular group named “Form Follows Function”. My job was to help my group use my research data to design services tailored to the needs of the community, and to help the group decide what current services might not be useful.

Over a lovely dinner of roast lamb and scalloped potatoes, each person made introductions. Following is a brief overview of the Task Force members:

- Patty Parsons: Board member who works at the Benton County Health Department. She was prepared to help with grant writing. About thirty years of residence in Alpine.
- Joyce Long: the President of the Alpine Community Center Board. Likes to work with teens. Lifetime resident.
- Dorothy Brinkerhoff: Board treasurer. Twenty six years in the community. Local business owner. Member of the Garden Club and Lions. Treasurer for several non-profits.
- Jim Cavanaugh: fourteen years in the community. Retired printer from Chicago. Working with the Monroe Library Group.
• Gordon Debbie: 4 years in the community. Engineer at Wah Chang in Albany.
• Diane Hoff Rome: artist and writer. Gordon’s wife.
• Rachel Unrein: lifetime resident. Alpine pre-school teacher.
• Rob Hinton: ten year resident. Has two young children. Active in pre-school program and Monroe Library Project. Construction worker.
• Mary Allardt: thirty seven years in the area. Taught Kindergarten at Alpine School. Property developer. Bought the Alpine Market property.
• Sandy Halonen: thirty year resident: Executive Director of Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation in Eugene, Oregon.
• Bryce Halonen: Retired planning director.
• Adele Kubein: (myself) twenty six years of property ownership in Alpine, researcher.
• Elaine O’Brien: fifty year resident. Librarian at Monroe High. Alpine Garden Club member and volunteer at Center.
• Bob O’Brien: lifetime resident. Member of Alpine Garden Club and former school board member. Self employed logger.
• Gary Weems: seventeen years in area. Alpine Garden Club. Retired engineer. Wants to see how the Garden Club can interface with Community Center Project.
• Gary Watts: Local business owner. Thirty year resident.
• Evelyn Lee: Alpine Community Center Board Secretary. Nineteen years in area. (Alpine Community Center Transition Task Force Minutes November 11, 2007). We were informed that the reason we had been called together that evening is to consider if the community really wants to buy the property, what kind of deal it could come up with, and what the alternatives were.

Task force members agreed that all of these questions needed to be addressed, and began to ask further questions and to discuss the merits of building a new structure on park land. One Board member was invested in staying the course at the school building;
she expressed doubt that a new building will be big enough, and she thought many of the programs such as the computer lab and facility rental would be lost if a new building were erected. The retired logger said, “The idea of a building across the park is not new: 24 years ago we had lots of discussion, from small to grandiose. Then it faded because people lost interest.” The President of the Board reined us all in and enumerated what the board wanted from us as a task force: a three to six month commitment, help working through the how and why of a yes or no decision to acquire, and the steps it needed to get to one or the other of these choices (to purchase the Center or to build a new center).

The School Board purchased a market valuation of the facility which listed the value at $325,000. Members of the School Board who were on the Task Force explained to the recalcitrant Board member that the School Board is bound to prove fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers, so the valued sum had to be the starting asking price. The Board member, who was the same person which earlier argued against a new structure, vehemently disagreed, insisting that the buildings could be bought for far less than the asking price. The Board member was invested in remaining in the school building and would not consider alternatives. The dialogue ended inconclusively with one Task Force member pointing out that there was no way to approach the School Board if there is no funding, and another urged the board to get an appraisal on the building so that financing options can be pursued. The final word comes from another Task Force member who states: “Appraisals can be useless.”

### 6.3.1.1 Teams and Their Purposes

The ability to draw and engage community members in a community project is important for any revitalization project. Each community member has something to offer. When people are asked to volunteer and made to feel as if their contributions are valuable, a sense of ownership and empowerment is created within the community. The Community Center Board was effective at engaging community members from varied professional backgrounds to contribute their expertise to the project. The Board was also effective at maintaining that engagement through the process. Few community members
fell off of the list or ignored the Task Force process, and Task Force members fulfilled their promises of research and outreach. The Task Force idea was an effective way to divide necessary tasks into portions which were not overwhelming to the group as a whole. Each Team was composed of the people best suited to it, and the Task Force Teams were made to feel valuable and appreciated through the attention and respect they received from the Community Center Board.

The next Task Force meeting was held on December 2, 2007, with fifteen community members present, including Board members. Over the course of the previous month the Community Center Board decided how best to utilize the Task Force and they came up with the idea of action teams. The idea was to create action teams titled: Market Valuation, Future Opportunities for the Park and School, Form Follows Function (the team I agreed to work on), and Funding. Each team was handed a detailed description of the team’s task and desired outcome, including the product the team was supposed to generate. Each hand-out also had a one page description of important factors such as comments from the Board and resources available to the teams. Following is a brief description of each Team and its intent.

- The Market Valuation team’s task was to reach a reasonable figure to offer to the Monroe School Board, as well as a schedule of overdue maintenance needs and costs.
- The Future Opportunities for the Park and School team’s task was to devise a strategy for the best cooperative use of the Alpine Park and Alpine School properties.
- The Anchor Tenant team was supposed to identify potential anchor tenants by defining, suggesting and recruiting a possible anchor tenant.
- The Form Follows Function team’s desired outcome was a plan that considered the functions of the Community Center and related those functions to the ways the community center uses property and resources.
- The Funding Action Team’s desired outcome was to explore funding options from foundations and other sources, to build relationships with foundations,
and acquire foundation funding for the acquisition and capital improvements for the school property.

(Alpine Community Center Transition Task Force Minutes December 2, 2007).

We gathered at the tables in the cafeteria for another repast prepared by the Community Center Board, lasagna this time, while the Board presented an executive summary. The Board received 70-80 responses to the latest fundraising letter, half of them from the immediate Alpine area. The Board estimated that between two to three-hundred families used the recycling center each month. Fifteen families participated in the pre-school, but they noted that there were no figures kept for facility rental.

Discussion points made during the executive summary included plans with Bellfountain Church community to lodge the pre-school if needed; an update on negotiations with the School Board; updates on the idea to swap Park land for the campus; and financial considerations for a maintenance budget. I was pleased to hear that the Board had incorporated some of the recommendations I presented to it at the last Board meeting, such as the need to talk with community members in order to plan future programs, and the need to maintain records of use at the center.

Minutes of the latest meeting between the School Board and the Community Center Board were read over dessert as the Board provided answers to some questions raised at the first meeting. The property was firmly valued at $325,000, but it was believed that the School Board was willing to reasonably negotiate, and deadlines had expired for any grants to be written for purchase funds, as the grant cycles did not coincide with the Center’s needs. After the summary and the minutes, the teams separated to different tables to discuss their team topics over coffee. The overall attitude of the Board members was refusal to concede defeat even though there were no means of funding at that time.

Even though the task force was separated into groups the general conversation continued with a recurring theme: the devaluation of the building by Board members. The Treasurer of the Community Center Board claimed there was asbestos under the building,
and stated that there was so much dry rot in the window sills that she could put her finger through them. The former School Board member pointed out how strapped the school district was, and explained that the district’s primary duty is to raise as much money as possible.

The Board found itself in a conundrum: It could not purchase the campus without funding, but it could not find funding if it did not own the campus. The Funding Team reported on talks with the Ford Family Foundation.\(^\text{10}\) This Foundation requires community leaders to go through an intensive leadership building course before they will consider funding. The board sent a letter with eleven community leader signatures to the Foundation in order to apply for the leadership training course. They were enthused about the training because it involved the whole community. The training includes fund raising techniques and trains the community how to work together. We learned that the Oregon Community Foundation funded the Alpine Half Century, a bicycle race designed to bring business to the town, and the Ralph Hull Foundation\(^\text{11}\) had provided several thousand dollars in funding for the center. Board members on the Funding Team seemed quite optimistic that funding was available for the project. Ideas for funding abounded but the basic problem remained to be solved.

In spite of its effective marshalling of local professionals, the Board continued to have sporadic outreach efforts to county and state wide organizations which had the potential to serve as anchor tenants at the facility. The Anchor Tenants Team presented an idea to rent a part of the property in order to support the rest. The Board had already approached Head Start and the Boys and Girls Club, but nothing was worked out with those organizations\(^\text{12}\). The idea came up of using part of the facility for a business incubator, or some other non-profit. As the Park Strategy Team gave their report, the conversation segued back to use of the Park to build a structure.

The Alpine Garden Club owns the property directly opposite the Community Center. The original 1983 plan for the Community Center was to build a center on the Park property. The Garden Club Board provided us with detailed plot maps of the park complete with historic ownership, parcel divisibility, and water supply. There was much
talk about using the park for collateral, until a Task Force member who is an elderly lifetime resident says: “Would not like to see something come about that would jeopardize the long range future of the park. If you use it as collateral you could just as well lose it.” A member of the Garden Club concurred: “The Garden Club would want to know the same things as a foundation or lender. We want to support this, but not until we know this is a viable option.”

At this point I asked for particulars of the process between the Garden Club and the Community Center Board, and I was told, “There is none.” I counted six members of the Garden Club present, so I probed by summarizing in order to get some idea of the Garden Club’s attitude toward the project. I heard that the subject had been discussed in Garden Club meetings, but that no decision had been made, and no clear questions had emerged for the Garden Club to address.

Someone once again mentioned the importance of record-keeping. It emerged that no one actually knew who was using the center, how they were using it, where they were coming from, and how many people used it. Unofficial figures of use were provided by Dorothy, who claimed the 200-300 a month figure for the recycling center, fifteen preschool families, and 35 people there the day before for a baby shower.

6.3.2 Continued Community Engagement

Surprisingly the January 6 2008, meeting had more participants than the December meeting. There were twenty Board and community members attending. There were School Board members, Garden Club Board members, Community Center Board members, and Task Force members, with some new Task Force members present. Over dinner we received an executive summary.

The Community Center’s year end fundraising letter had 37 respondents and raised almost $3,000 dollars. The fundraising project led the Ralph Hull foundation to donate matching funds. The most exciting news was the cooperation of the Garden Club with the land swap idea. It was surprising because the Board’s negotiations with the Garden Club seemed to be at a standstill a few weeks earlier. Yet the Garden Club announced that it had decided that if the Community Center is able to come up with the
majority of the funding to purchase the school, and supply a plan that shows ability to operate it in a viable manner, the Garden Club would be able to put up as much as 34 percent of the value of the facility by liquidating a platted (county designated division) plot on the west side of Alpine Chapel Park. There were constraints and contingencies though, which included the requirement that the Alpine Community Center must demonstrate that the local community would financially maintain the site for public use, and the Center must provide services or activities that would replace the lost area of the park. The Garden Club proposed making a low interest loan to the Community Center from the proceeds of the liquidation. The Garden Club also pledged to keep the payments minimal so as to just cover administration costs and maintain the legality of the loan. The Garden Club stated the purpose of this action was to help serve the needs of the community at large.

The focus groups ate together and then engaged in brainstorming. The combination of groups present at the meeting created a paradox: The campus was simultaneously the object of desire yet was also continually devalued, particularly when its owner, the Monroe School Board was present at meetings. The Maintenance and Valuation group reported on asbestos issues, with a quote of $49,000 dollars for asbestos removal. Two task force members agreed to help with grant writing, and others would call funders to learn timelines and capital grant opportunities. But the funding team still lacked hard use numbers, as well as financial information.

In spite of the hopeful report on potential funding sources I observed a disconnect on the part of the Community Center Board between momentous moves and day to day operational protocol. It seemed that Community Center Board members put great effort into project needs that offered big results such as the land swap deal or grants, but they avoided engaging in the day to day administrative tasks which were the foundation of a non-profit agency. As a part of my Transition Team’s report I shared my research findings with those present and once again advised the board to begin comprehensive record keeping for two reasons: to assure that the Community Center is responding to the
needs of the community, and to demonstrate support for inclusion in grant proposals. Following are some other recommendations I made to the Board at this time.

- To develop a brief questionnaire that could be given to facility renters when they pick up the key in order to gather demographic and use data
- To make efforts to solve transportation issues by working with the local school bus company
- To address the community’s kindergarten and after school needs
- To make another attempt to work with the Boys and Girls Club
- To use the questionnaire I developed for the board a year ago
- To press for outreach to the Latino community

I left the meeting with the perception that the Community Center Board had achieved real progress. It seemed possible to strike a purchase deal with the School Board. But I was pessimistic regarding the client base and the ability of the Board to maintain the project without a paid administrative employee. The interview phase of my research completed, I viewed a large component of the community excluded from the Center’s services by barriers of transportation and communication. By this time I had no doubts about the professionalism of the Community Center Board, but that did not seem to be the only issue.

6.4 The Issue of Inclusion

The Community Center Board had some blind spots. Administration and record keeping were sporadic and ineffective. These were technical matters which could be remedied. But the inability of the Board to reach out to marginalized members of the community was detrimental to the success of the project. At an October 2007 Community Center Board meeting, a Board member who also works with the Latino community expressed interest in having outreach posters translated into Spanish in order to recruit parents for the pre-school, and another Board member opined that the facility rental component of the center be advertised in Spanish to solicit renters for weddings and quinceañeras. At that meeting a discussion was had about the needs of the Latino
community, but there was no actual decision made regarding the suggestions, and no follow-up in spite of my repeated urging. This isolationism evident in the internal culture of the Board excluded a valuable component of the community which was willing to engage in community building alongside the Anglo community members.

6.5 Attempts to Animate the Community

The Community Center Board attempted to animate the community through various events at the Center. The Alpine Half Century Bicycle Race was created as a fundraiser for the center, and is widely advertised. It is the descendant of the Alpine Wild Rose Festival and Turkey Trot fundraisers which dissolved in the late 1980s. The race brings out many SBC residents who don’t normally use the Center but who come to volunteer. Before and during the race the Community Center and the road outside fill with volunteers, tourists, bicyclists and their support teams. The fee for the race includes food. This year it was burritos made with donated components. A few bicyclists will return, lured by cool, misty Alsea Falls only seven miles from the center of town, or to re-visit the Alpine Tavern, with its turn of the century dilapidated ambiance. Bellfountain Road is already a bicycle touring road. Bicyclists brave log trucks in order to enjoy the views of woods and rolling hills.

Community engagement with the Center’s offerings seems to wax and wane irrespective of season or event topic. Potlucks which often double as community meetings bring varied numbers of people. I attended them for a year; attendance ranged from over fifty to just three people, participant numbers unknowable until the time the doors opened. Attendance at potlucks did not taper off with time; it was wildly uneven the entire year I witnessed. Some months the cafeteria is filled with conversation and food, families and the elderly, and other months the keyholder is left waiting for attendees, until he gives up and goes back home.

On summer evenings food smells mingle with conversation as parents sitting on the redwood deck built by volunteers supervise children playing in the old school playground. The center advertises potlucks and other activities on the local Monroe cable
station, and approximately fifty percent of my informants told me they had seen advertisements, but all outreach was conducted only in English language format.

Parents of younger children are drawn in because they can cut their toddlers loose to shriek, run, and play on the toddler play structures in the pre-school section of the building. The Center also provides the toddler play room for play dates and birthday parties. There was some talk of adding an arcade of games for the older kids.

The biggest draw at the Center is the annual Holiday Fair. Alpine has a long history of fair event promotion for the Community Center. In 1983, when I moved there, there was the annual Wild Rose Festival and Turkey Trot, and holiday fairs have been held almost every year since in some form or another. The holiday fair tradition is one that never fell by the wayside as other events did. The fairs give local artisans a chance to sell their wares, and local people a chance to buy holiday gifts from local producers. I attended the November 2007 Holiday Fair armed with camera, tape recorder, and notebook, prepared to take a thorough look at this attempt to animate the community.

I was surprised by the number of people and vendors in attendance. Vendors came from as far away as Eugene, Oregon. At any given time there were at least 300 people walking around in the gym, where the fair was set up. I counted thirty five vendors selling local products, which ranged from homespun yarn, goat milk lotions and soaps, candles, hand carved wooden kitchen utensils, quilts, and jewelry, to winter vegetable starts, indoor herb plants, and tree saplings. Organizers of the fair advertised in professional artisan circles and managed to garner vendors who travel the Tri County area (Linn, Benton, and Lane counties) at holiday season to work various fairs. Alpine volunteers cooked vats of chili and soup, platters of chicken and trays of potato dishes and lasagna. Other community members made various desserts, breads and salads.

The cafeteria was festively decorated with Christmas trees and garlands, and the tables were full of diners. The community center charged five dollars per plate, and the line wound around the counter and all the way to the gym. One by one, food items ran out, until finally there were a couple of broken pieces of pie and a little thick soup left in the bottom of the five-gallon stock pot. Approximately four hundred plates of food were
sold, and eventually even the cookies with burned bottoms and the last two broken pieces of pie disappeared, leaving newcomers looking for more. So it seems there is still some animation left in this community for certain activities, but is it enough to sustain the project?

6.6 Failure with Another Chance

As with many research projects, this one really does not come to an end. The Community Center Board faced failure with the eventual sale of the school buildings, but their efforts paid off to a certain extent. Following is an account of events which transpired after my research was completed. Dorothy Brinkerhoff, one of my interviewees and a Community Center Board member was kind enough to keep me up to date on the project verbally and by sending me newspaper clippings.

On 2 April 2008, the Alpine Community Center Board offered the Monroe School Board $150,000 for the facility, an offer the school board called “a bargain basement price” according to an article dated June 24 2008, in the Tri-County News, a local paper published in Junction City. On June 23 2008, the Alpine Community Center Board advised the Monroe School Board that in response to feedback from parents in the area, the Alpine Community Center Board had sought for and received funding to offer a childcare program which was to begin in fall, 2008. The Alpine Kinder-care and Enrichment Program received two grants for start-up funding, which they pursued in response to needs identified within the community. The Community Center Board advised the School Board that there was a need for both before and after kindergarten childcare to support working parents. The Alpine Kinder-care Program provides a comprehensive childcare program. Activities include enrichment, creative and recreational programming, such as arts and crafts, computer introduction, dance, dramatic play, games, music, story time and snack.

However, on 24 June 2008 the Alpine Community Center board withdrew their purchase offer for the facility. Reason listed for the withdrawal was the deteriorating condition of the facility. The Community Center Board stated: “Having rejected our
purchase offer, we will continue to monitor your disposition toward selling and may submit another offer in the future that would take into account the condition of the property at that time” (Letter dated 24 June 2008). The Community Center Board advised the School Board that it felt the programs the Center provides benefit and support the Monroe School District and that the Community Center Board would like to continue to collaborate with the School Board, and focus on “clear and direct communication”.

As of August 2008, the Alpine Community Center was on a month to month lease basis with the Monroe School District. No other clear offers had been made for the facility. The Community Center Board made a deal with the Bellfountain Church to house the pre-school in the old Bellfountain School building, but there were no plans in place for the remainder of the Community Center’s programs should Alpine School be sold. The Monroe School Board considered evicting the Community Center at the end of August in order to prepare the building for sale, but a School Board member pleaded the case for the Community Center. The month to month rental agreement was contingent upon closure of the cafeteria and gym until the results of an air quality test to measure fungus came in. If the results were good, the gym was still not to be used until it received a thorough cleaning by the Community Center staff.

Relations between the Monroe School Board and the Alpine Community Center board were strained. The Community Center requested a third-party assessment of the facility’s environmental quality which was conducted by a local hazardous waste management firm owned by an individual whom the Community Center Board thought was impartial. The firm found no evidence of asbestos under the building, but subsequently contacted the School Board with inflammatory statements regarding the state of the school, particularly the gym, which he claimed was fungus infested. The linoleum tiles buckled in the kitchen, due to a leak under the floor, which the School District had to repair. The Alpine Community Center Board blamed the School District for lack of maintenance prior to the school closure, and the Monroe School Board blamed the Alpine Community Center for skimping on heat, thus causing damage to the building. The cost of oil rose prohibitively over the winter, and the School District was responsible
for one-half of the oil bill according to a prior agreement with the Community Center. The School District found itself with an ailing building and no buyers at their price, and the Community Center found itself in limbo, since there seemed to be no move toward consensus on construction of a new building in the park, and nowhere else to move all of the Center’s services at that time.

6.6.1 Hope

But good fortune intervened. By January of 2009 things had changed quite a bit. In September of 2008, a locally owned business named Queen Bee Honey bought the property from the School Board. At first this seemed like the final blow to the Community Center, but Queen Bee wanted to generate some income from the property while it set up its honey processing business. Since the gym at the Center, and some of the other rooms were not needed while Queen Bee builds its barn, the company made a month to month rental deal with the Community Center Board. Tad Buford, one of the owners of Queen Bee, said the Community Center was welcome to use the spare space the business did not need. Buford said: “We are just looking for them to pay the utilities. The main use is the pre-school, and there are so many families that are using that, so it’s no big deal for them to stay here.” (Odegard 2007).

In a personal phone conversation on January 8 2009, Dorothy Brinkerhoff told me the Community Center decided to start a community garden in the Alpine Park to benefit the Senior Nutrition Program and the Food Bank in Monroe. She was elated to report that the pre-school, library, and tot gym would remain just as they are. Queen Bee was willing to share the cafeteria whenever the Center needed it and to continue to rent the facility for gatherings. The Monroe Junior Dragon team was sharing the gym with the aerobics class, and Dorothy was on her way to mail the first month’s rent check to Queen Bee. I attended the 2008 Holiday Fair. This time the community really did have something to celebrate about.

6.6.2 Ford Family Foundation

The efforts of the Community Center Board to reach out to the Ford Family Foundation eventually led to the best news the Board could hope for. The Ford Family
Leadership Training Course focuses on inclusion as one of its primary tenets of community revitalization. If the Board were to be accepted into the Training Course it would be trained and urged to reach out to all community members, no matter their income or ethnicity. On March 18, 2009, I received the following e-mail message:

Hello!
The Ford Institute for Community Building, a branch of the Ford Family Foundation, helps rural citizens in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California create vital communities through trainings, assistance grants and resources.

The Institute believes that vital rural communities develop from:
1) A broad base of knowledgeable, skilled and motivated community leaders.
2) A diversity of effective community organizations.
3) Productive collaborations among organizations and communities.

Rural communities vie for help from the Ford Institute, but the ones who win support have proven that they are already bootstrapping their way forward under their own steam.

The South Benton County area attracted the attention of Ford Family Foundation by showcasing its ability to accomplish goals as a community with little or no outside support and demonstrating how community organizations collaborate to achieve goals. Alpine Community Center, Alpine Coop Preschool, South Benton Communities Museum, Junior Dragons, South Benton Community Enhancement, Read on Wheels, Art in the Park, and much more, all take place because neighbors get together to make them happen.

Tom Gallagher, the Director of the Ford Institute for Community Building, dropped in during a Leadership in Action training event attended by twenty five community members representing numerous local organizations on Friday to deliver the good news in person. We have been accepted into their five year leadership training program. This is an incredible opportunity for us to continue to grow partnerships and collaborations and to build upon our previous successes. Our high school students will have even better access to the Ford Scholars Program which funds four years of tuition to Oregon Colleges and Universities. Our local non-profits will benefit with access to
grants for community building.

Dorothy Brinckerhoff
Director, Alpine Community Center (Private communication 18 March, 2009)

Work on the Monroe Library and Community Center is currently at a standstill, with the handsome, dilapidated train station still on blocks on Monroe’s Main Street. The town of Monroe is considering hearings on public transportation needs. Alpine’s birds are still singing. The Alpine Tavern is still full of beer drinkers and the smells of deep fried food. The gardeners have harvested and preserved summer’s bounty; the hunters have put up the season’s venison and life in Alpine goes on as usual.
Chapter 7 Analysis: Broader Implications

7.1 Introduction

Through interviews and observation this research provides a view of South Benton County as seen through the eyes of its residents. We learn how they live, and what strategies some residents use to cope with low-incomes, high transportation costs, and educational shortfalls--issues which affect many residents. We hear aspirations for the future, and voices which are left out of planning processes and ignored by the privileged. We see committed community members work toward a common goal for decades, energy waxing and waning, but never completely quiescent.

Brown and Swanson’s argument that rural communities play important roles in the nation’s life rings true (Brown and Swanson 2003: 1). In addition to history, which binds us to our rural roots, rural areas are seen as valuable respite from urban life, and as desirable retirement locales. Our food originates in rural areas, and there is a growing market for locally produced food to supply local farmer’s markets and co-ops as environmental awareness of the effects of industrial farming increases. Benton County’s rural residents are seeking ways to profit by providing products which are desirable to and affordable by an increasingly affluent population. Wilt’s blueberry farm on Hwy 99W south of Corvallis has gone organic, the Holiday Fair at the Alpine Community Center showcased a broad array of expensive local organic products and handcrafts, and the Ten Rivers Food Web, a local organization geared toward sustainable food systems, is promoting organic agriculture and local food processing facilities (personal communication).

Local food movements are growing throughout the nation, and rural Benton County is in the position to profit from the trend. My informants universally agreed that it is the natural beauty and quality of life which led them to South Benton County. Parents cited the safety and reassurance of the small community as a draw to the area in spite of what they felt were various educational shortfalls. Rural South Benton County can be
considered an asset to the area, one which can improve Benton County economically through revenues, and which draws admiration for its quality of life.

Various aspects of the South Benton County community are reflected in the Community Center project. The Board is not separate from the community; its members are an embedded part of it. Yet the population segment from which the board derives is not representative of the community as a whole. Which populations are included in the project and which are excluded are vitally important to the eventual success of the project. Perceived community needs should inform and guide the Board as it moves forward with the Community Center Project. (Attached as Appendix D is a chart of perceived community needs which emerged from ethnographic interviews)

This analysis examines the role of the Board in the revitalization process, the interactions or lack of them between the Board and the community, as well as the internal processes of the Board which affect the outcome of the project. The role of women in the revitalization effort is of interest because this community effort is largely led by women who have consistently committed time and effort to the project over the long term. The means whereby the Board reaches out to segments of the community can provide a blueprint for other rural revitalization projects as well as a lesson in the value of inclusion and the pitfalls of exclusion.

Important aspects of these processes include the Board’s responsiveness to perceived community needs, its actions regarding inclusion of marginalized community members, the means whereby the Board communicates with the community, and the Board’s own internal self-assessment process. The structure and process of meetings between the Board and the community illustrate the ways in which the Board engages community members into its own vision of the Community Center. This analysis also examines the position of marginalized populations in the community, their relationship with the project, and addresses the potential of marginalized community members to support and advance the Community Center project.
7.2 Community Development: Changing Expectations

The face of rural America is changing, and South Benton County reflects that change. This ethnographic look at a cross section of the community at times reads like a historical account; hunting and food preservation are still practiced as a means of subsistence, neighbors help each other, family and church still feature prominently. But there are new faces and homogeneity is a thing of the past. As Johnson finds, demographic change is a causal agent, fostering changes in rural America, and the influx of new people presents communities with challenges and opportunities (Johnson 2003: 19-20). Some of the energetic, active members of the Alpine Community Center Board are in-migrants. As Johnson points out, in-migrants expect a level of services which may be above that currently provided by the communities they settle in and they bring expertise and skills that may reinvigorate existing institutions (Johnson 2003: 31). It is that expectation of services and outside expertise combined with the consolidation of the school system, which propelled the current iteration of the community center project. But the composition of the Community Center Board also reflects long-standing relationships within the community. It is this steadfast hold on the ideal of a community center by Board members who are long term residents which also informs the direction of the project. Newer in-migrants found themselves immersed in a community which already had the vision of a Community Center. The newcomers brought with them skills which added to and revitalized the project.

Luloff and Bridger’s interactional approach to community development suggests that community development efforts can build from existing fields of interaction among a local population (Luloff and Bridger 2003: 213). Wilkinson’s work agrees with the notion of a dynamic social “field” which is more than the simple sum of its parts (Wilkinson 1970). The current manifestation of the project is a continuation of activism which began in the early 1980s and may be based on values present in the community for generations. The interactions and inter-relationships between the Monroe School Board, the Community Center Board, the Alpine Garden Club, and long-term residents affect the outcome of the project. Newcomers to the project had to learn the rules of extant
relationships and their effects on the project. The expectations and contributions of newcomers had to complement the expectations of long term residents on the Board if the Board was to function in an effective manner. Trust and social capital built over the years between the groups allows them to work toward a common goal. Proximity dictates interaction, and the volunteer culture of the area ensures that this proximity leads to some form of beneficial collective action.

The changing demographics of the Community Center Board are driving a change in expectations and operations. The Alpine Community Center Board at its inception in the early 1980s had a modest goal: to raise a building in the Alpine Chapel Park which would provide a place for youth to hang out and for the community to meet. Even that goal was eventually downgraded to the construction of a cinderblock restroom on the park premises and repair work on the existing cedar wood shelter in the park. The original iteration of the Community Center Board featured some of the same players we see in the current Board membership, but there are some recent additions which have brought new expectations and techniques of funding and operation. The ideas to send out mass mailings to solicit funds and to network with outside agencies are recent. The solicitation for input and the openness of the Community Center Board to my research is also a recent trend on the part of the Board.

The population of the area has changed considerably, and the expectations of the community have changed along with the influx of generally wealthier and highly educated in-migrants as well as the influx of Latinos into the community. These expectations are manifest in responses to interview questions regarding desire and perceived need for services at the Center and in the community (Appendix D). There is a demand for English language classes, self-improvement and self-actualization classes, such as art, computer, and exercise classes, as well as the increased demand for youth, child care, and transportation services. Most of these are expressed needs which are fairly recent in the history of the community center project.

Residents of South Benton County agree with Wilkinson (1991:310), when they strive to create a place in which they can interact within their local society. It is the local
interactions which prevent South Benton County from simply becoming a suburb of Eugene or Corvallis. South Benton County residents hold onto their identity as a rural area, with its concomitant self-view which Hummon (1990: 57) describes as “family oriented”, “a superior place to raise children”, and “safe”. This self identification as a rural community united in its goal of sustaining a healthy, safe, and community-oriented environment for its inhabitants affects the ways in which the community mobilizes to meet its own expectations. There is a moral imperative built into the community’s identity which drives community members to service.

7.3 Evaluation of the Board

7.3.1 Leadership Strengths

The strengths of the Alpine Community Center Board are in its committed individuals, particularly women, and in the wide range of the members’ professional and life experiences. The ways in which the Board pursues funding, and solicits community engagement are effective. The organization of the Board is defined and stable. Each member fulfills his or her specified duties and goes beyond those duties to individually labor toward the success of the project through outreach to funders, agencies, and potential partners. Richardson writes: “The most successful leader will set a tone that promotes professional development and skill building in all of the collaborators” (Richardson 2000: 100). In my observations of Board interactions I found such a tone prevalent. The Board sought leadership training through the Ford Family Foundation by presenting a letter which eleven community leaders signed on to, and Board members attended Regards to Rural conferences organized by the Rural Development Initiative. Individual board members continue to seek training and enrichment opportunities in order to become better leaders.

The most important strength the Board possesses is the steadfast belief that its project is important for the community and will eventually succeed. Vidich and Bensman write that when taken in the context of larger societal changes, even leaders seen as hard-boiled realists, “become genuine romanticists”; and it is this “romanticism” which keeps the local community engaged with the goals of the leaders (Vidich and Bensman 1968:
It is precisely this “romanticism” which we see when Community Center Board members continue to work toward their goal regardless of the obstacles. This refusal to concede defeat does keep the rest of the Board and the community engaged, and is an asset.

7.3.2 Process

The process of identifying and engaging the Transition Team consistently led to large turnouts at Transition Team meetings and generated information and actions useful to the project. The Transition Team process also created a welcoming environment for newer community members who were asked to participate on the Team. By asking for input and expressing respect for potential contributions, the Board generated a feeling of ownership in the project. Transition Team meetings were relaxed and collegial. Members of the community which might have never met due to the scattered geographical household locations got to know each other in an environment which fostered a shared sense of purpose.

The Board can be adaptive when new opportunities present themselves. Members were quick to seize upon advertisement possibilities offered when the local telephone companies began to provide cable service to the area, and the Board uses the internet to maintain contact with supporters. Brown and Swanson’s argument that the social and economic organization of community life have been radically changed by technological advancements (Brown and Swanson 2003: 2), is supported by a look at the means the Alpine Community Center Board uses to communicate with the community, seeks funding, and networks with other rural organizations. The community center board maintains an electronic database of users, provides computer classes and wireless services, and seeks funding through electronic searches. When the community center board wants to send out notice of a new class offering or a potluck, it goes to its electronic mailing list first. The local telephone cooperative, Pioneer Telephone Co-op, began to install fiber optic cable in the early 1990s, leading to a network that extends all the way to the coast, and spans rural Benton County.
7.3.3 Shortcomings

The Board also has some shortcomings. There appears to be an inability or reluctance to reach out to marginalized population segments. When faced with the prospect of losing the building, the Board was inconsistent in its reactions. The acquisition of the Transition Team and the organization of the ensuing meetings was excellent, but the Board did not pursue prerequisites needed to solicit funding for the purchase of the building. Even though funding organizations expected proof of need, support, and capacity, the Board did not use services available to it such as survey research and summaries of my research which it could have presented to funding organizations.

Jean Richardson notes that strategic rural leadership is collaborative, involves a diversity of people, opinions and perspectives, and is grounded in an understanding of the varied facets of the community. The Board involved certain segments of the population in the process, but ignored other facets of the community. Richardson also writes that leaders must be able to be open to opportunity (Richardson 2000: 92-5). The Board seized opportunities presented by community members with something to offer the process, but ignored other opportunities such as the research provided at its request and the potential contributions of excluded population segments.

7.3.4 Exclusion of Population Segments

Disenfranchisement of population segments is not a purposeful action on the part of the Community Center Board. But lack of energetic pursuit of enfranchisement is. Board members know that the Community Center project requires a broad base of supporters if it is to succeed. Supporters need not be wealthy donors. Granting agencies look at capacity and population served as well as matching funds when considering applicants. It is difficult to know how many of the 9,304 low income people the Census Bureau lists as Benton County residents live in South Benton County, but the ethnographic component of this thesis provides a sample of their lives, views and needs.

Alpine Community Center Board members are somewhat insulated from the realities which some of their constituents face. This disconnect contributes to a loss of
much-needed support for the Center and for the Board as it strives to succeed. Flora and Flora emphasize the inclusion of all citizens in the decision making process in order to ensure commitment to the project or endeavor (Flora and Flora 2003: 223). Emery N. Castle provides an overview of change in American rural society with an admonition toward exclusion. He recognizes that some communities have declined and others prospered, not always due to controllable factors (Castle 1995: 495). South Benton County has the potential to be one of the communities that thrives by virtue of its natural setting and through the committed actions of its residents.

Vidich and Bensman recognize that leaders in rural areas often originate from middle or upper class backgrounds, and draw their support from dominant groups in the area; therefore they express the interests of their power base (Vidich and Bensman 1968: 283). The Community Center Board is composed of longstanding community leaders from such backgrounds who answer mainly to community members in other leadership capacities. There is little crossover contact with community members who staff the Monroe Food Bank and low income medical services. Yet there are Board members who work with marginalized populations at the Benton County Health Department and with a low income lunch program. The lack of internal input from Board members who do serve the Latino/a and low income population into the Board’s planning and provision processes is a symptom of the Board’s disconnect with marginalized population segments.

Though the Board has excluded population segments in the past, the foundation for inclusion exists in the culture of the area. South Benton County has an egalitarian background which can be read in its history. In 1983 when I moved to the area, family members of both the Hull and Oakes families worked alongside their employees in the woods, cutting trees and working equipment. These families which own large tracts of land as well as the Hull-Oakes Mill, boasted family members who went to the Alpine Tavern after a day’s work dressed like the rest of the workers, covered in the same chainsaw oil, and driving beat up “crummy” pickups, just the same as the rest of their compatriots. Wealthy South Benton County landowning families have always prided
themselves on their egalitarianism and work ethic, proudly working in the fields and woods with their employees. Fellow workers are not looked down upon no matter how little money they have.

Sherman’s (2006) “moral capital” is the basis for class judgments in the area. As long as a family member is working to provide for the family in a manner acceptable to the community, he or she is judged to be a part of the community, and as such, worthy of jobs, assistance, and compassion. Hunting, gardening, canning, fishing, and other means of subsistence are respected. The families who depend on drug dealing, or in which providers drink up their wages, are subject to community censure, unfortunately censure which at times carry over onto family members who are not responsible for the transgression. This culture provides a foundation for egalitarian collective action. The makeup of the Alpine Board and the community members involved in the project lends itself to the ability to accept marginalized community members.

7.4 The Role of Women in Leadership

The role of women in the community life and social spheres of South Benton County are indeed important. Ann Tickameyer and Debra Henderson write about the new prominence of women’s efforts in the area of political mobilization and activism. Tickameyer and Henderson argue that the primary opportunities for and targets of women’s activism often are in grassroots responses to the realities of their communities. Women are composing a strong cadre of activists and their contributions have always been central to local issue-based activism in rural communities (Tickameyer and Henderson 2003). The Community Center Board was interested in assessing community needs in spite of its inability to pursue solutions to all of them. Women are often in closer contact with a community’s daily life and needs, and as primary caregivers, in this particular instance, they can empathize with the needs of low income mothers and Latinas, as well as the needs of the elderly population.

Women play an important role in the Community Center project. Though men are not discouraged from participating, women make up a majority of board members and
community volunteers. Through participant observation and interviews I learned that male volunteers and the male Board member involved in the project were more pragmatic and cautious, whereas female volunteers and women on the Community Center Board clung to the project with enthusiasm even when the odds against it were overwhelming. Males whom I interviewed were more pessimistic about the chances the project would succeed, but they continued to work at it, seemingly from a sense of community duty.

It was the women on the Board who refused to concede defeat when the Monroe School Board refused the community center’s purchase offer. In spite of the imminent loss of the facility, the Community Center Board continued to plan for the next year’s programs. The board did not deny the facility problem; it did find an alternative location for programs, but the general attitude of the female board members was one of a “glass half-full” mentality. Optimism prevailed through funding drives and as the board sought grants and volunteers. When I was interviewing Dorothy for the third time, after the School Board issued the purchase ultimatum, she summed it up when she said: “So there is something left here, so there is a drive to keep some kind of community thing going. I am optimistic there is a future here, I just don’t know what it will be”.

Richardson finds that women and senior citizens are some of the most important local resources, and she thinks that placing them in leadership roles can be the key to successful programs. She calls women: “A centrally important factor for sustainable rural community development” (Richardson 2000: 34). The interactional process of my relationship with the community center board, and the preponderance of willing female informants in this thesis project are gendered and salient, and are repeated in other case studies of community development projects I have read, including the case study Richardson cites of the Fairfield, Vermont community center project. Much literature has been devoted to the roles of women in community, and Anna Tickameyer and Debra Henderson state that though rural women’s roles have changed little over the last century, what has changed is the interest in those roles by researchers (Tickameyer and Henderson 2003: 109). Women’s roles are not the focus of this thesis, but it is impossible to ignore the impact of local women on the Alpine Community Center project.
7.5 The Role of Social Capital

Effective leadership is not the only factor in successful community projects. Don Cohen and Laurence Prusak define the norms and relations embedded in social structures as “social capital”, which they define thus: “Social capital consists of the stock of active connections, among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible” (Cohen and Prusak 2001: 4). One way the Alpine Community Center aids in the building of social capital is by providing a place for the community to interact. The loss of the Alpine Market and the Alpine School dealt a blow to the community. Those were the locations for interaction. People who might not have met because of the scattered geographical distribution of residences in the area, met at the school or the market. The community needed a replacement location for interaction, which has been provided by the Center. The monthly potlucks provide a relaxed venue for interaction for any South Benton County resident who is seeking companionship and social interaction.

The Center also is the product of that social capital. The redwood deck by the Center’s kitchen was built by volunteers with donated goods. At Board/community meetings people stood up to offer their services as carpenters, gardeners, and plumbers. The Community Center re-sale shop, library, and computer classes are all staffed by volunteers. Luloff and Bridger write that in communities with high levels of trust and norms of reciprocity along with dense networks of civic engagement, people feel obligated toward each other, and are able to work together for the common good. Trust, reciprocity, and engagement reinforce each other according to Luloff and Bridger (Luloff and Bridger 2003: 206). Users of the Center feel an obligation to return the benefits in the form of volunteerism.

The Alpine Community Center Project can also continue to build social capital and relationships within the community because of its needs. The Center’s unmet physical needs are actually a boon for social relationships. Luloff and Bridger argue that social capital is not strictly governed by rational choice. The motives that lead volunteers
to participate are not so clear, and volunteers may not participate in all actions; they may target actions specific to their interests. This is important when stratification divides a community, such as the South Benton County community. Butler-Flora and Flora examine social capital in the context of rural development, and claim that norms of reciprocity can be reinforced by collaboration, developing a united view of a shared future, or engaging in collective action (Flora and Flora 2003: 214).

I observed a long term resident who is a conservative, retired logger, work next to a long-haired organic farmer to build a structure at the Center. These are people who would never have cooperated on a project if it had not been for the Center’s needs.

7.6 Followers

The word “leader” implies followers. At Community meetings I observed that many people who are not interested in leadership positions are prepared to offer needed services on a volunteer basis. In spite of their dedication, Community Center Board members cannot fulfill all of the roles needed to bring the project to fruition. They need help. Ronald Hustedde writes that organizations and communities may rise or fall because of their leadership, but leaders cannot operate without followers. Effective followers are eager to learn more, acknowledge problems, and seek solutions. They are committed to the cause, not to the leaders (Hustedde 2003: 112-15). Hustedde argues that community based leadership is a fluid construct, with roles exchanged based on the best interest of the community. The ethics of community based leadership involve the well being of everyone in the community at large and must be consistent with the values of the community (Hustedde 2003: 116-17). The Community Center Board does have a base of followers, which include user/volunteers at the center. During the Transition Team meetings, various volunteers emerged as leaders when their talents were needed. Not once did I observe any Board member present his or herself in a manner that would denote a status difference with any other community member.
7.7 The Roles of Participatory Action Research (PAR)

7.7.1 PAR: Interaction of Researcher and Community

In the section on methodology I recognize that as a researcher who is also a participant in the Community Center project, and a property owner in South Benton County, I did not enter into this thesis project with a blank slate. But I did strive to present an impartial view of the community as it reveals itself to me, and to analyze my findings in a manner consistent with logical social science precepts based in research. Whyte challenges the view that social science research should confine itself to the discovery of scientific facts and avoid involvement (Whyte 1991: 8). Richardson also recognizes strengths in the scientific method, but she reminds us that it can discourage contextual thinking, which is essential for application and assessment (Richardson 2000: 72-4).

7.7.2 Assessment

Jean Richardson delves into the need for assessment and the factors that promote effective leadership, both topics of vital importance to the success of the Alpine project. Richardson writes that evaluative processes are important to understand social linkages and she thinks evaluation and assessment are tools which can be used to increase the effectiveness and success rate of rural development projects (Richardson 2000: 72). It is difficult for any organization to perform an objective self-assessment. Yet assessment is vital in order for an organization to continue to adapt to the challenges it may face. One of my roles as a researcher was to report my findings to the Board for the purpose of assessment. The Board wanted to know how effective it was in current service provision and outreach. These were questions I periodically asked users of the center in interviews and during the course of participant observation. I provided regular reports to the Board on my findings. Jean Richardson makes a case for just the type of researcher/community partnership that William Foote Whyte writes about and which I participated in for this project. Richardson cites local efforts to fill in service gaps in rural areas and emphasizes the importance of assessment, which can be facilitated by data provided by researchers who are participant observers. She points out that it is difficult to
determine what works and what doesn’t and why. New efforts such as the ones now facing the Alpine Community Center Board, must build on lessons learned. Richardson writes: "The community must be engaged in the development of the vision. . . the community too must assess progress and make changes." (Richardson 2000: 32).

7.8 Excluded Potential and Unmet Needs

The Alpine Community Center project is a massive undertaking for a small community. In the ethnographic portion of this research we have seen individual members of the Alpine Community Center Board express their anxiety regarding the small number of volunteers and users. Yet we see the Board has isolated itself from some segments of the community. Insularity can breed stagnation and inaction. Flora and Flora theorize that strengthened relationships can result from fostering increased interactions among unlikely groups. They emphasize the inclusion of all citizens in the decision making process in order to ensure commitment to the project or endeavor (Flora and Flora 2003: 223). The Community Center Board and the community itself lose valuable sources of volunteer labor, support, feedback, and potential funding sources when the Board neglects outreach to marginalized portions of the population.

Latino/as and low income residents were excluded from the planning process. Few low income respondents used the Center and none of the Latina respondents did, though they expressed a desire to do so. There is quite a bit of literature on low income rural Anglo populations, but I found a dearth of literature on the subject of Latino/as in rural communities. The ethnographic material I have gathered in the course of this research has the potential to contribute to the research gap in literature regarding Latino/as in rural North America.

7.8.1 The Latino/a Community

Kenneth Johnson supports the perception of growth in rural Latino/a communities when he notes the increase in Latino/a population in nonmetropolitan counties. Minorities account for 48 percent of that increase, with Latino/as prominent in that minority population (Johnson 2003: 25). Rural communities which are striving to develop cannot
afford to ignore or disenfranchise such a portion of the population. The Latino/a population is often thought of as urban, but Rogelio Saenz and Cruz Torres write that many Latinos come from rural areas and are thus drawn to them not only in search of agricultural jobs, but by preference. Saenz and Torres note that the Latino in-migrant population is quite young, and they write about the educational challenges young Latinos face in rural areas (Saenz and Torres 2003).

7.8.1.1 Needs and Potential Contributions

In South Benton County (SBC) it is not only educated, wealthy in-migrants, able to afford rising property prices whom are changing the social characteristics of the area, it is also the Latino/a community, which is slowly integrating into the larger community with varying degrees of success. Alpine Community Center Board members recognize this shift. We hear Community Center Board member Dorothy talk about her desire for increasing diversity in the community, and her recognition that Latino/a families are beginning to buy property in the area. We see another Board member, N. dismiss the Latino/a community, and we see board members who, in spite of their professional interest in the welfare of the Latino/a community, lack the impetus to pursue the support of the Latino/a community in order to enlarge the center’s base of users and supporters.

We hear the voices of Latinas who seek to integrate into the community. The findings of this particular ethnographic research are supported by a similar ethnographic research project authored by Tina Dodge Vera, Megan Patton, Lina Loaiza, and Margaret Henning, conducted in fall of 2006. One of Vera et al’s findings was that Latina women found language differences problematic, but rather than having volunteers they deal with learn Spanish, the women wanted the opportunity to learn English, (Vera et al 2006:3). This is a sentiment that was expressed in all interviews with Latinas conducted for this thesis. Research for this thesis provided a view of a Latino/a community which lives in South Benton County for the same reasons as other residents, which has the same family values as the rest of the population, and the same aspirations as well. The Latino/a community wants to integrate into the community. It wants to work community gardens
with other community members, it wants English language classes with the recognition that language is the key to success, it wants better educational opportunities for its children, and its members are willing to work and volunteer to create these opportunities. The Latino community is knocking on the door, but it is not empty-handed. It has youth who are willing to volunteer and engage; it has adults who are willing to put the welfare of the community ahead of their own comfort. It offers as much as it asks.

The Latino/a population is aware of the Community Center’s offerings, desirous of using them, and more than willing to contribute time and energy to the project. Vera et al also list other supporting findings in their article, such as the expressed need for Spanish language informational posters, and a desire to participate in community gardens (Vera et al 2006: 4). Yet the people responsible for Community Center programs and who are seeking to tailor programs to the needs of the community are not hearing Latino/a voices. On numerous occasions I offered to translate posters for the pre-school, facility rental, and computer classes into Spanish for outreach purposes, but no one followed through on supplying English language files for translation, or made any offers to print Spanish language posters. In fairness, various board members agreed with the importance of doing so, and stated that they had plans to do so, but these plans were never followed through. I was the only person involved in the project which set out to specifically include Latino/a voices into the planning process.

7.8.1.2 Latina Focus on Youth and Children

Latinas interviewed for this thesis cited education for themselves and their children as one of their foremost concerns. They were dismayed by language barriers which prohibited their engagement with the schools their children were studying at, and worried that their children were not receiving adequate educational opportunities. They placed a high value and stock in the potential for their children to lead comfortable lives through the benefits of education. One informant works long hours and denies herself many pleasures in order to provide a college education for her four children, and another is urging her oldest child to apply to local colleges upon graduation from school. Saenz
and Torres emphasize the benefit that education can bring to the Latino youth population. They write that today’s “. . . Latino youth will be called upon in the coming decades to generate the revenues required to sustain national and local economies” (Saenz and Torres 2003: 63).

Saenz and Torres suggest that the extent to which Latino youth are able to succeed economically depends on removal of structural barriers, and the degree to which they can access education and other societal resources. They note the shortage of rural bilingual education programs and other targeted services (Saenz and Torres 2003: 63). The perception of this lack emerges in interviews with my Latina informants. These interviews provide a view of a Latino community which knows its needs and has given thought to solutions; they lack only the ear and concern of community leaders to aid them in implementation. If the Community Center is to benefit the community, and the community is to support the Center, then the Alpine Community Center Board must learn to truly represent the whole community.

7.8.2 The Needs of Low Income and Senior Residents

According to the 2000 Census, Benton County as a whole contains a sizeable low income population, with 10.6 percent of residents claiming incomes under $10,000 per year, and another 19.8 percent with incomes under $25,000 per year. These figures are probably higher in the current economic downturn with the loss of a number of local jobs in Junction City and Corvallis. The same way the exclusion of Latino/as robs the Community Center project of volunteer and user base, so does the exclusion of low income Anglos. In addition, the Center’s mission to fill gaps in local needs is not fulfilled as long as members of the community in need are excluded from the planning process. The lack of transportation to the Center, particularly for youth and seniors exacerbates the problem of exclusion by preventing community members from availing themselves of the Center’s services even when they want to.

7.8.2.1 Emphasis on Youth

Just as we see within the Latino community, low income residents of SBC put the welfare of their youth to the forefront; low income residents who do not have children, or
whose children are grown, still ask for youth services at the Community Center and are willing to volunteer as long as they can help youth while doing so.

Lichter et al’s contention that America’s rural children are overlooked and their needs ignored (Lichter et al 2003: 97-98), may be true insofar as institutions are concerned, but local informants are highly aware of the needs of local youth. Twenty-seven out of thirty interviewees expressed more than a passing concern regarding a lack of services for youth. Informants from all geographical SBC communities stated that youth had no place to hang out. The common worry was that kids who have no wholesome outlets will get into trouble. This fear is not unfounded; a look at Benton County juvenile crime statistics shows a total of 486 arrests in 2004 (last date available) with juvenile arrests of 280 per 10,000 Benton County residents. It should be noted that the arrest numbers for 2004 are the lowest numbers since 1991. Though juvenile arrest rates and causes are not the purview of this thesis, the drop in juvenile crime rates does merit further study. Perhaps youth services, such as Jackson Street Youth Shelter in Corvallis, and the Monroe Library Project may have an effect on juvenile crime statistics. Empirically, residents of South Benton County personally experience the effects of youth property crime when they must replace tombstones at the Alpine Cemetery, local homes are burglarized with youth found to be responsible, or the shelter at the park is torn down to burn in the fire pit during drunken midnight revels. These observations drive the community’s perception of need.

Lichter et al supply numerous empirical studies of rural juvenile alcohol abuse, drug use and juvenile crime in their article (U.S. Dept. of Education, in Lichter et al 2003: 102-03). These citations are sufficient to convince that the perceptions of my informants are not mistaken when they worry that youth in South Benton County need additional services. Lichter et al find that early intervention programs do work, but rural schools lack the resources to implement these programs. All informants with children and teens, no matter their socio-economic standing, bemoaned the lack of services and offerings at Monroe High School, and when queried, stated that the most important offering the Alpine Community Center could provide would be youth programs. Lichter
et al support this perception; they agree that school based programs and other youth development programs are effective means of steering youth toward positive development (Lichter et al 2003: 97-107).

7.8.2.1 The Needs of Working Mothers

Working mothers are one segment of the low income population in this study who expressed a desire for additional services at the Community Center. Latina mothers universally saw the lack of transportation to the center as a barrier to use of the preschool, community garden, youth services and English language classes, services which would bring that population segment in as users of the center. One informant pointed out that middle school children, which need youth services, do not drive.

Joan Gross and Nancy Rosenberger’s ethnographic look at rural poverty in Benton County, and Profiles of Poverty and Hunger in Oregon, the Oregon Food Bank publication, support my finding regarding the need for child care in South Benton County. The Alpine Community Center pre-school fulfills a portion of that need, but it currently is not serving the low income population, which depends on childcare in order to advance financially. Latina informants particularly expressed a need for child care. The pre-school, which is filled to capacity, is but one needed service. After school programs appeared to be equally as needed. Interviewees who were low income members of the faith-based community consistently expressed a desire for programs to expand educational opportunities for their children, and Latina women were frustrated with the lack of offerings in the Monroe schools.

Lichter et al state that education for all rural youth “. . . is essential for making a successful transition to productive adult roles, and to good citizenship” (Lichter et al 2003: 101). The Community Center has the potential to add educational value for Latino/a and White youth in the area. An expansion of youth offerings may help provide local youth with something to do besides drunken tombstone toppling.
7.8.2.2 Seniors

The Community Center Board made attempts to recruit senior services providers into the project when they approached the Senior Nutrition Program in Monroe. Seniors I interviewed stated their needs clearly, with transportation as the biggest barrier to use. The experience of the Community Center Board when it tried to lure the Senior Nutrition Program to the facility might have been successful if there had been a means of transportation. One elderly informant explained the problem when she said that she could not longer drive the curvy road to Alpine at night.
Chapter 8 Recommendations and Conclusion

The Alpine Community Center Board has the potential for success. It has good leaders who understand how to engage a portion of the community, and it has a pool of committed and accomplished allies. It has members who provide an institutional memory of past community projects and community interrelationships. Following are some recommendations for the Alpine Community Center Board which arose from this research.

8.1 Summary of Recommendations

1) Create Services for Latino/a residents.
   - Spanish language outreach posters should be created for outreach to the Latino/a community. They should be placed in locations frequented by members of the Latino/a community and include a description of services including facility rental, pre-and after-school program, and community garden.
   - English classes should be provided.

2) The Board should pursue funding targeted to underserved populations.
   - The Board should research potential funding sources.
   - Maintain thorough use records and use research data in order to prove capacity and need to funders.
   - Reach out to the Boys and Girls Club and Head Start again to see if a partnership can be formed.

3) Expand offerings for youth.
   - Create a hang-out place and things older kids can do such as computer and study space, video games, and events such as dances and parties
   - Target youth at the local schools with advertisements for the gym, ball field and playground facilities.
4) The Board should actively pursue methods of providing transportation to the center.
   - Continue to seek a relationship with the local school bus company which has vans available.
   - Look into grants and financial support from the community to fund a vehicle for the center.

5) Seek means of improving leadership capacity of the Board through seminars, publications and associations with learning institutions and local professionals.
   - Seek demographic data, and research publications which can inform the Board regarding the challenges low-income and minority populations face in South Benton County.
   - Seek a partnership with the Oregon State University research community. The Departments of Sociology and Anthropology are engaged in research with low-income populations in the area and could offer the Board some needed input.
   - Delegate research and translation tasks to community members.
   - Engage members of the community versed in non-profit funding to assist in grant writing.
   - Appoint a volunteer coordinator: Match the right volunteers to the right tasks.

6) Target outreach to underserved populations in order to invite participation in planning meetings and raise the level of community engagement.
   - Women in particular should be targeted. My research uncovered a strong desire to volunteer among underserved female community members.
   - The Board should strive for openness and outreach to other female voices to create a feeling of family ownership in the community toward the Center. Families model their behavior after that of other family members.
Engage community members in a way that would promote a sense of ownership toward the project and a sense of empowerment that comes when one is assigned an important task.

8.2 Conclusion

The findings from this research reconfirm Stauber’s (2001) belief that investment in rural communities is a critical public policy for the nation as a whole. Rural America has much to offer the rest of the nation. As I write this the United States is reeling from the collapse of numerous large scale financial and manufacturing industries. Many Americans are adversely affected by the consequences of this global event. People are beginning to consider different ways of commerce, local food systems, and the benefits of community oriented action conducted by community members, and targeted to individual communities. Stauber claims that rural America does have something to offer the rest of the country. The rising awareness of environmental considerations, the effects of globalized food systems, and watershed degradation, lead us to look to rural communities as a “laboratory of innovation” (20) as we all seek the way forward. Stauber writes: “Given the small size and strong social bonds, rural areas should have advantages in creating possible approaches” (Stauber 2001: 20).

The Alpine Community Center Board has the human resources to make the Community Center project work. The makeup of the Board provides people well-grounded in community activism who have exhibited a long-term commitment to the community. The self-selected nature of the Board, which tends to see its own needs and the needs of its own demographic segment of the local population, can be overcome. There is no deliberate ignorance of the circumstances of other population segments, and some Board members are aware of the needs of the rest of the community. The Board needs to consciously work on expanding its vision to include the rest of the community. It needs to reach out to other population segments in order to engage the rest of the community and provide a solid foundation for the project. This is a challenge the Board is capable of rising to.
I see the criteria of community revitalization success as the ability of the engaged members of the community to work toward common goals based on values which the community agrees are sound. Individuals don’t have to share a complete value set, but they do need to be able to empathize with the needs of the entire community and respond to them in a compassionate manner. By this criteria, the Board and the community are half-way there.

The capacity of the community itself to assist in the project and to engage with the Board was proven by the large number of volunteers who agreed to work on the Transition Task Force. A broad array of professionals are willing to donate their time and expertise to help make the project a reality. There is a need for services the Center can offer and an untapped user base willing to work to help the Center provide for community needs. The Latino/a community expressed its willingness to volunteer as did low income community members and young people I interviewed. Matching the right volunteers to the right tasks can lead to success and long term support for the project.

The upcoming Ford Family Foundation Leadership Training Course will address many of the shortfalls I found in my research. The course teaches community leaders how to engage marginalized populations into community projects and how to pursue funding sources. The Foundation also trains their protégés to recognize and enhance the potential contributions of all community members.

The dawning of 2009, with its promise of change, is reflected in the happiness Dorothy expressed as she headed off to the post office to send in the first rental check of the new year. This project may be over for me, but my concern and interest in the community of Alpine will not wane. Perhaps I have been affected by a bit of the optimism I heard at all of those Board meetings.

The South Benton County community does see itself as individual villages, separated by geography, but its residents also see themselves as part of South Benton County. Monroe is seen as the hub, but members of Irish Bend, Bellfountain, Alpine, and Monroe all use the Alpine Community Center. Interviewees switched from discussions of their own town to a description of the area as “South Benton County”. Barriers to
inclusion are few, but they are powerful. Barriers are class related: the lack of understanding of the needs of the disenfranchised community on the part of the Board, the difficulty of transportation for low income and the elderly population, and the lack of outreach to disenfranchised community members. To paraphrase Emery Castle: the people of South Benton County have a good grasp of their own problems, and they are resourceful and resilient (Castle 1995: 502). But their view will have to broaden if they hope to be successful in their endeavor. My thesis research ends here, but I will be engaged with the community for as long as they request my assistance, and I hope to eventually see all the hopes expressed in this project come to fruition. As Brown and Swanson point out: Rural communities play important social, economic, and political roles in the nation’s life, and the value accorded them in American culture and society merits our attention as researchers (Brown and Swanson 2003: 1). South Benton County will continue to play a vital role in the prosperity of the area and thus merits our concern and attention as academics and citizens.

The 501 © (3) status was actually revived in 2005.

Jane is not her actual name.

As with other interviewees, names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

I found it difficult to find written anti-immigrant materials in this area of Oregon. I am sure they are available in communities which are openly anti-immigrant, but this part of western Oregon is fairly progressive and anti-immigrant sentiments are not explicitly displayed. Electronic venues, by their nature provide anonymity; therefore it was easy to find many anti-immigration sites with an electronic search.

The butcher shop is inspected and certified by Benton County officials. The family is allowed to take in already slaughtered game and farm animals and dress, butcher, package and store the meat. They are not allowed to slaughter animals. In order to slaughter animals the shop would have to be USDA certified with an inspector present at slaughter time. This is an onerous requirement which excludes most small businesses.

Jane worked as a milker at local dairies from the age of eighteen until she was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder with a schizophrenic component at the age of 38. She contributed to the support of her family for the twenty years she was able to work in spite of her illness. Jane still gives her mother her Social Security check to help with the mortgage payment and food costs.

I attended the 16 November, 2008 potluck. Only I, two board members, and an interested new community resident showed up. We ended up eating burgers and fried fish at the Alpine Tavern. The Board continued to work toward purchase of the property.

Which as far as I can tell was never implemented.

The Ford Family Foundation is an Oregon based family business which is in the top five land-holding companies in the nation. The foundation is funded by proceeds from Roseburg Forest Products, which is a national lumber supplier. The company was started by the Ford family which is no relation to Ford Motors. The founder strongly believed in giving back to the community, and he set up various funds targeted toward student scholarships and community improvement projects in Northern California and Oregon.

Ralph Hull was one of the owners of the Hull-Oakes Lumber Mill in Bellfountain. The Hull and the Oakes families have also contributed to community enhancement through land donations, park building, and cash donations to community projects. The Ralph Hull Foundation has donated money to the Center for operating expenses.

Nothing was ever worked out with The Boys and Girls Club, or Head Start. I think the Board was too busy with day to day business to pursue the matter.

In a personal communication with a Board member in July of 2008, I discover that the entire uproar over asbestos has been false. In June of 2008 the Board finally got around to getting an asbestos inspection only to find that there is actually no asbestos under the building. Asbestos was one of the clubs wielded against the School Board’s valuation of the property, and was held up for years as an example of the reduced worth of the property.

Initially the Community Center Board approached me to assess community support for the Center as well as perceived community needs. I designed a survey with the assistance of two professors at Oregon State University, one in anthropology and one in sociology. I first presented the questionnaire to Board member N. who was very resistive to the idea. I then met with the entire Board and once again presented the questionnaire and a presentation on how it might be used. The full Board was receptive, and pledged to look into funding for printing and mailing. A Board member who works in administration at the Benton County Health Department offered the use of her interns for data entry and statistical analysis, and I agreed to do the qualitative assessment. The purpose of the survey was for planning and for grant applications, particularly for the Ford Family Foundation, which was interested in financing the project. The survey idea came up in numerous meetings but was never implemented.
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Appendix B

Questionnaire for community members:  

I am talking to people in this community about their views on life in South Benton County, the Alpine Community Center, and the needs of the community.

1. How long have you lived in South Benton County?

2. What is your age?

3. Do you have children/grandchildren?

4. What are their ages? Do they live with you?

5. What do you think the advantages to living in South Benton County?

6. What do you think the disadvantages to living in SBC?

7. Do you work outside of the community?

8. What services do you use in Monroe? What services do you go to Corvallis or Eugene for?

9. What kinds of activities are you involved in locally?

10. Are you aware that there is a community center in Alpine that serves SBC?

11. How did you hear about the center?

12. Do you use the community center?

13. In what manner do you use the center?

14. If you are not using the center, what would make you use it? (What might keep you away?)

15. What are the services you would like to see at the center? Some possible services are:
   ___ Community garden plot  ___ After school activities
   ___ Food bank  ___ Other
   ___ Library  ___ Computer access
   ___ Classes (what type)  ___ Pre-school
   ___ Gym
16. What services do you think are important for the South Benton County community in general?

18. Do you do volunteer work?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix C

Proposed Survey for South Benton County Residents
Prepared for the Alpine Community Center Board

1. What is your town of residence?

____________________________________________

2. What is your age?

________

3. What is your gender?

________

4. (Optional) What is your ethnicity?

________

5. Do you have children?
Yes___
No___

5. What ages is/are your child/ren?

_____________

6. How long have you lived in South Benton County?

_____________

7. Are you aware that there is a community center in Alpine that serves South Benton County?
Yes___
No___

8. Do you use the community center?
Yes___
No___

9. What services do you use at the center? Please check all that apply:
___ Exercise classes
___ Computer classes
___ Fitness Center
___ Pre-school
___ Re-sale shop
___ Community gatherings
___ Playground
10. What services would you like to see at the community center?
   ___ Community garden plot
   ___ Yoga class
   ___ Extended hours
   ___ Food bank
   ___ Exercise classes
   ___ Computer classes
   ___ Pre-school
   ___ Re-sale shop
   ___ Community gatherings
   ___ Youth activities
   ___ Transportation (to and from center)
   ___ Facility rental
   ___ Library
   ___ Gym
   ___ Outdoor exercise
   ___ Internet access
   ___ Other (Please list)

11. Of the above services what services would you use?

12. If you do not use the community center, why not?

13. What hours would you be most likely to use the center?
   ___ Mornings
   ___ Afternoons
   ___ Evenings
   ___ Weekends
15. Would you be willing to volunteer at the community center?
Yes  
No

16. Under what conditions would you be willing to volunteer at the center?
   ___ Youth activities
   ___ Re-sale shop
   ___ Library
   ___ Teach workshops
   ___ Maintenance
   ___ Other (please list)

17. Would you be willing to vote for an operating levy?
   Yes  
   No

18. Would you be willing to contribute toward renovation of the center?
   Yes  
   No
   In what manner would you be willing to contribute?
   ___ Financially
   ___ Labor
   ___ Materials
   ___ Work party

19. Would you be willing to pay fees for services at the center? (Classes, events, membership, etc.)
   Yes  
   No

20. Are there other things that you think South Benton County needs in addition to or more than a community center?

21. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your opinion is important!
## APPENDIX D
### PERCEIVED COMMUNITY NEEDS BY DEMOGRAPHIC

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