Economic Development: Ruleville, MS Gets Down to Business

Civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, a native of Ruleville, Mississippi, was known for her statement, “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.” The city of Ruleville finally became sick and tired of negative out-migration, closed store fronts, an eroding economic base, and under-performing schools. With Southern’s help, Ruleville has completed a strategic planning process for change and has begun a journey toward self-determination and economic and social revitalization. The citizens of Ruleville are already implementing strategies contained in the plan, with projects in housing, education, and health care already underway. See the completed strategic plan HERE. Since 2004, Southern has provided over $120,000 in grants to help launch this revitalization effort and currently seeks additional resources to keep the momentum going.
Education: Phillips County, AR Public Schools Improving

Last year, Southern awarded a $1.2 million, three-year grant to help fund an initiative to improve student performance in Phillips County’s (Arkansa’s poorest county) three public school districts, with several of the schools in a state-designated academic distress. This innovative leadership program for teachers and principals is aimed at increasing students’ test scores, and the results have been outstanding. The number of students reaching the advanced and proficient levels on the standardized math and literacy exams increased by 8% in the first year.

Economic Development: Growing Small Businesses

When Barry Friedman’s scrap materials company burned down, he was struggling to keep his business alive. Southern helped Barry recover from this devastating loss and provided him with additional financing to expand his business. Friedman Scrap Materials Company now employs 15 people. It also helps clean up and improve the environment by recycling hundreds of tons of scrap metal every year.