

New coalition focusing on jobs and home ownership in Crisfield area

Tourism the first step; raising money to start master plan

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CRISFIELD — A group of community leaders has created the Greater Crisfield Action Coalition to address issues vital to Crisfield and its economic development. The group will focus in the areas of workforce development, job creation, home ownership, business revitalization and tourism with the mission "to transform Crisfield into a vibrant and thriving community where everyone has the opportunity to succeed in an outstanding and meaningful way."

A non-profit 501(c)(3) Community Development Corporation like this was recommended in the Lofton Report of 2002. There are an estimated 5,000 such entities across the country including in Easton, Baltimore and Ocean City, but this is the first CDC in the Crisfield area. Members believe the revitalization of the area's economy requires working beyond the City of Crisfield and have defined the Greater Crisfield Community as those areas associated with Crisfield accessed by the Route 413 corridor. This may eventually include the island communities reached from the Crisfield City Dock.

Jay Tawes, who is treasurer and for 40 years a booster of civic projects, tourism and business development, said the coalition is "dedicated to helping Crisfield become the town we always felt it could be, vibrant, prosperous and beautiful." He said, "I have never been a part of a group like this. For the first time, we have

talented representatives from the whole community coming together, and we are on the same page."

While the region will require more than tourism to become a thriving community, the coalition believes that tourism is the best and fastest way to jumpstart the economy. Tourism leverages the area's significant outdoor and historical resources, provides entry-level jobs, and showcases the community to entrepreneurs and developers who can help to create non-seasonal, family sustaining employment.

Following this logic, the GCAC's vision is for Crisfield to be the number one unique tourist destination on the Eastern Shore. Crisfield can differentiate itself from other destinations by focusing upon its unique history with crabs, oysters and other seafood; its many well-known successful residents; its special waterfront; its wide range of outdoor and water sports; and its friendly people and outstanding hospitality. The coalition has identified its core values and a set of strategies for achieving its vision, all of which are spelled out on its website www.GreaterCrisfield.org.

The coalition's Board of Directors brings a wide variety of knowledge and experience to the task, and members come from a broad and diverse cross-section of the community. Board members and officers include Keith Campbell, Erik Emely, Shawna Kearsley, Isabelle Regester, Paul Regester, Charlotte Scott, Angenette Stewart, Jay Tawes and Darlene Taylor. Brief biographies of each member are available on the website. Ms. Scott is president, Mr. Regester is vice president and Ms.

Taylor is secretary.

The group has contributed the funds to engage an outside consultant, who specializes in community development activities, to help them assimilate all of the past studies of the Crisfield area and to develop short term, immediately actionable goals that will create movement toward the vision. Once clearly defined, measurable goals have been established and prioritized, the group will seek both private and public funding to achieve them, holding responsible parties accountable for results.

The coalition looks forward to working with all individuals, groups, agencies, and local governments who have the betterment of the Greater Crisfield Area as an objective. In addition, members hope to engage the entire community in this effort. Individuals are encouraged to contribute their ideas, time and dollars to further the cause. A fundraising campaign is being kicked off, with the goal of raising \$100,000 by Thanksgiving to move these efforts forward. This funding will be used to complete the first five-year action plan and as matching-fund seed money for leveraging additional funding streams, along the way to becoming self-sustaining.

Supporters may make donations (tax exemption pending) through the GCAC website - www.GreaterCrisfield.org. The website also may be used to contact the group with feedback, suggestions, or to volunteer. In addition to the website, interested parties are encouraged to visit and like us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/greatercrisfield.