August 13, 2020

Resident Recruitment & the New Narrative

Benjamin Winchester
Rural Sociologist
In the 1980s, rural Americans faced fewer teen births and lower divorce rates than their urban counterparts. Now, their positions have flipped entirely.
Mechanization of agriculture

Roads & transportation

Main street restructuring

School consolidations
We have **survived** this massive restructuring.

Rural is **changing**, not dying or weak.

Rural is **resilient**.
Narrative Matters

What is your narrative?

Why would you move here?
Prepare for one of the largest demographic changes to rural America since 1930
75% of rural homeowners are Baby Boomers and older.

30% over 75 today!
Rural Rebound

Since 1970, rural population increased by 11%
  ◦ Relative percentage living rural decreased

1970

26%

203,211,926
(53.6m rural)

2010

19%

308,745,538
(59.5m rural)
The Rural Brain Gain

They choose rural age

30-49

And also when they are 50-64 (since the 1970s)
Newcomers chose rural for:

* Simpler pace of life
* Safety and Security
* Low Housing Cost

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.
Newcomers: Who?

- 31% moved primarily for a job
- 25% lived there previously
- 91% have some college or bachelor’s
- 75% household incomes over $50k
- 47% have children in household
- 14% telecommute!

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.
The Community is Welcoming of new residents by those likely to still live in community in 5 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Community is Welcoming</th>
<th>Likely to Live Here in 5 Years?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

• Creating groups, building their community
• Diversifying the economy
• Buying/starting businesses, working from home
• Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
• More than warm bodies
resident recruitment

- Complement the industrial recruitment model of economic development

- In a tight labor market...labor has the power to choose. Why will they choose your town over another?

- Many of the factors newcomers cite for choosing are also reasons people love to visit the area! Tourism!
Halo Effect: Visitation and Image

- A good place to live
- A good place to start a career
- A good place to start a business
- A good place to attend college
- A good place to purchase a vacation home
- A good place to retire

Percent Who Strongly Agree

Visited Past Year
Not Visited
resident recruitment

Community Development

Economic Development

Tourism

On the Map – Over the Edge – Welcome Home
Invitation Activities

• Graduates / class reunions

• Tourism locations – narrative @ gas station

• Existing resident networks – lift up voices of newcomers

• Media / Facebook
Economic Activities

- Business succession
- Co-working spaces (broadband)
- Auxiliary skills of newcomers
- Connect to remote worker employers
- HR and “the job” is not enough
Welcoming Activities

Front lines: Real estate agents, property managers, city clerks

- Grab-a-bite
- Newcomer supper
- Social after work
Civic Engagement Activities Impact Retention

1 in 22 people must LEAD*

* Assumes 3 people per new group
Civic Engagement Activities

• Regional events

• Involvement starts with a small request

• Make room for newcomers to define groups for themselves

• Leadership development programs
Key Shifts to Regional Living

Balancing Home, Work, Shop, and Play
Megaregions

http://discovery.dartmouth.edu/megaregions/
We live in a REGIONAL COMMUNITY.

in the Middle of Everywhere
Rural Life-Shed

No town is a one-stop-shop

- Home  →  Work: 30/45 minutes
- Home  →  Eat/shop: 60 minutes
- Home  →  Play – 2+ hours!
Middle of Everywhere

How can we make local decisions while at the same time respect the reality of lives?

The REGION is the primary unit of interest

Mayor, how do you market your town if you don’t know what’s going on around you?
What can you do?

• Consider resident recruitment as a possible outcome in your marketing efforts

• Learn about newcomers in your community

• Consider that some visitors might be looking for this information already...make it easy to find when they arrive
The Key: INTERACTION
Where We Live and Where We’d Like to Live
by community type

- City: 25%
- Suburb: 23%
- Small town: 30%
- Rural area: 21%

20% live rural/small town
51% would PREFER to

MOVING IN: Demand for rural and small town living!

Considerations

**On the map.** How can or do future residents locate information about our communities? This can include job boards, community events, and tourism opportunities as a few examples.

**Over the Edge:** Considering the Community. Once potential residents are looking into the region, what types of recruitment activities will put them “over the edge” in choosing our region over other locations.

**Welcome Home:** Now that residents are moving to the community, what can we do to help make it their home in their first days, months, and year. Ultimately these retention activities will keep them here.
The Rural Choice: Opening New Doors and Welcoming New Neighbors

The bottom line is people WANT to live and move here for what you are today and will be tomorrow, not what may have been!

Rural Revitalization is Upon Us!

Remember the housing statistics?

How welcoming IS your community?