



# CRDC FOCUS

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Crowley's Ridge Development Council, Inc.

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## May Is National Community Action Month

# CRDC prepares for celebration

As Crowley's Ridge Development Council edges closer to its 35th anniversary in 2004, it seems only natural to CRDC leaders to look back on the agency's humble beginnings in 1969. The fact that May is Community Action Month lends itself well to this introspection.

"We've come a long way since 1969," says Robert W. Wilford, executive director. "That's the year CRDC opened under federal auspices with a budget of only \$35,000. And, at that time, it was assigned responsibility for providing much needed services to only four counties: Craighead, Greene, Jackson and Poinsett counties.

"Today," he notes with pride, "we are using a budget of \$16-million and some 400 employees spread out over eight counties, to provide much needed services and relief to low-income residents of Northeast Arkansas."

But, Wilford explains, while the community action agency may be larger, it still does what it was originally established to do - and more. In 1998, the agency assumed duties in Crittenden, Cross, St. Francis and Woodruff counties, in addition to the original four geographic entities it was assigned.

Despite the increase in territory and personnel, the goal of the organization remains much the same.

Wilford points out that, in simplified terms, "ours is more a calling than a business. At least, that's how our employees feel. They provide much needed support and services for people who might otherwise be unable to turn to anyone else due to financial circumstance."

With May having been declared National Community Action Month

throughout the U.S., Wilford said his agency is striving to make CRDC more visible and make known the many services available to qualifying citizens throughout CRDC's area of responsibility.

Wilford, in his third year as executive director of CRDC, emphasizes that "ours is an agency that thrives on visibility. The more people who know we exist, the greater the possibility those who need us will seek the services and support they require and deserve."

Crowley's Ridge Development Council is housed in a three-story office building on Main Street in downtown Jonesboro. It's an austere building and the interior is certainly frill free. During a recent visit, one area mayor pointed out, only partly in jest, "It's obvious you aren't wasting a lot of money on administration!"

"We accepted this as pure praise," Wilford says. "Our goal is to put the funds out in the field where they are needed most."

Pointing to the many services provided by CRDC, Wilford explained that "it takes only a few minutes to prove that community action works. People are helped. And, in most cases, people are helped to help themselves!"

Among the programs offered by CRDC are:

### Aging Program

- Congregate meals
- Recreation/socialization
- Transportation
- Outreach
- ElderChoices Food Nutrition Program

### Child Development

- Head start

Child care food program  
R.E.A.C.H. (childcare referral services)

### Substance Abuse

- Chemical Free Living Center
- Northeast Arkansas Regional Recovery Center
- Prevention Resource Center

### Human Services

- Family Service Centers
- FEMA (emergency food and shelter program)
- Home energy assistance
- Assurance 16 (utility assistance case management)
- Family enrichment program
- Rental housing
- Home ownership opportunities
- Housing counseling
- Weatherization
- Housing preservation

"All of these programs are geared toward improving the quality of life for real people - people who might be your friends or neighbors," Wilford continues. "We're trying to offer a hand up rather than a handout to folks with specific needs. It's something we enjoy doing, and, I am happy to say, it's something the staff at CRDC does well."

He invited anyone wanting more information about CRDC and the programs it offers to come by any CRDC facility, including the CRDC central office at 249 South Main Street in Jonesboro.

"We're more than happy to tell the story of CRDC and community action agencies around the country, especially during National Community Action Month in May," Wilford concluded.