

Return to Rural – It is Possible

Alberta Program helps young families come back to rural.

It can be done. Young families can choose to build their lives in some of the most sparsely populated regions of Southern Alberta. It is being done through the *Return to Rural* project that SAMDA Economic Partnership Limited has initiated in the region around Hannah.

In May the Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) sponsored the *Creating Rural Connections* conference in Lethbridge, Alberta (see ARDN contact information below). SAMDA was one of the conference participants.

The philosophy of the SAMDA project is to create an environment, enhanced by internet and technological resources, where citizens of rural communities can live the life they always dreamed of. The project is aimed at attracting and retaining It is hoped that all different types of families will be attracted to or retained in to rural and remote communities.

Through Return to Rural, SAMDA provides exceptional technology and business supports, and strives to create social media, and municipal strategies that work for youthful demographics. Youth represent an amazing opportunity for rural Alberta; however, many communities struggle with developing strategies that resonate with them. The combination of timing, economics, climate and technology has created the opportunity for rural communities to reach out to their youth. Rural communities want young families, and SAMDA's project will help them get what they want.

The project has five main components:

- Encourages meaningful youth engagement
- Builds a technology network for rural Alberta
- Creates staff positions that are dedicated to business and technology support
- Implements an inventive social media strategy and targeted marketing campaign
- Designs a way for municipal plans to align with youth visions and values

Even one struggling rural community is one too many. Each struggling community is missing a link, and *Return to Rural* will be the way for SAMDA to find and insert that link.

To create this project, SAMDA partnered with Alberta Culture and Community Spirit and the Special Areas Board, which is also a project funder. They received additional funding from Rural Community Adaptation Grant Program.

SAMDA Economic Partnership Ltd is a not-for-profit organization that fosters community economic development. For more information visit the organization's website at www.samda.ca.

Even one positive example of new sprouts in rural communities brings blossoming hope to the rest of Alberta.

The Alberta Rural Development Network (ARDN) is a partnership of the 21 publicly-funded, publicly-governed post-secondary institutions in Alberta, working together to support and enhance rural development. These institutions have combined their expertise, ideas and resources to sustain Alberta's rural way of life. For more information on the Alberta Rural Development Network and the Creating Rural Connections conference, go to www.ardn.ca.

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