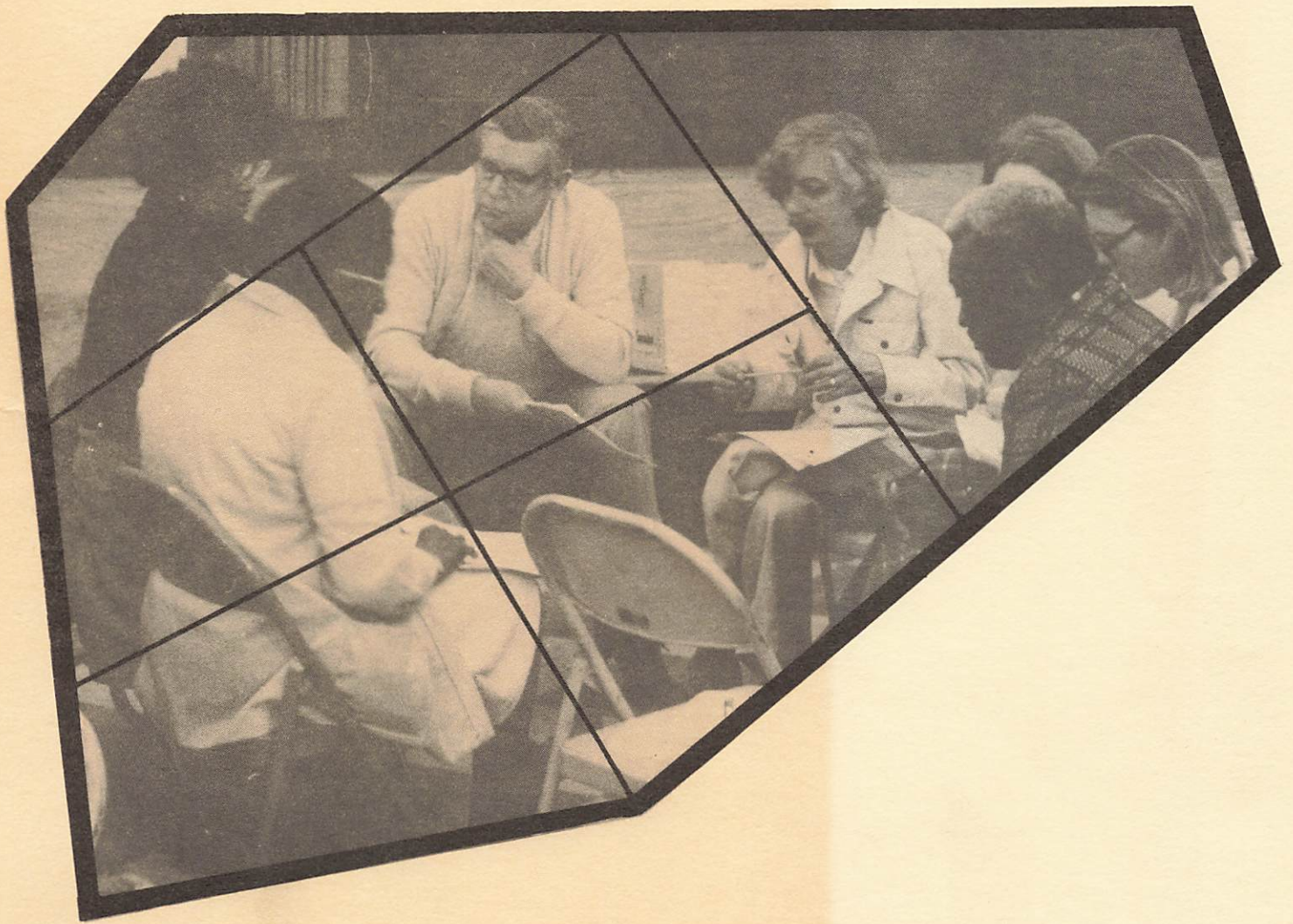
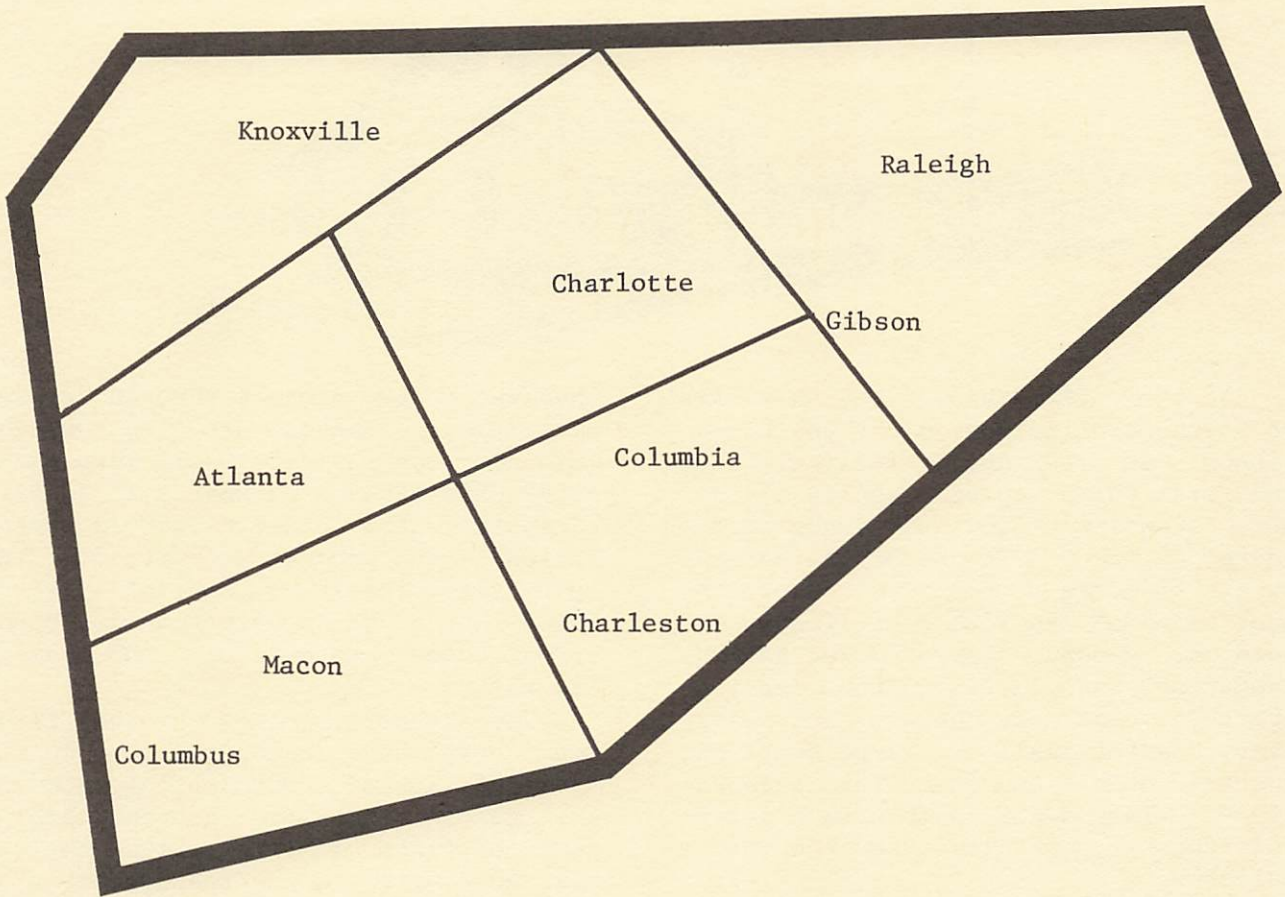


# THE ATLANTA REGION



a year in review...

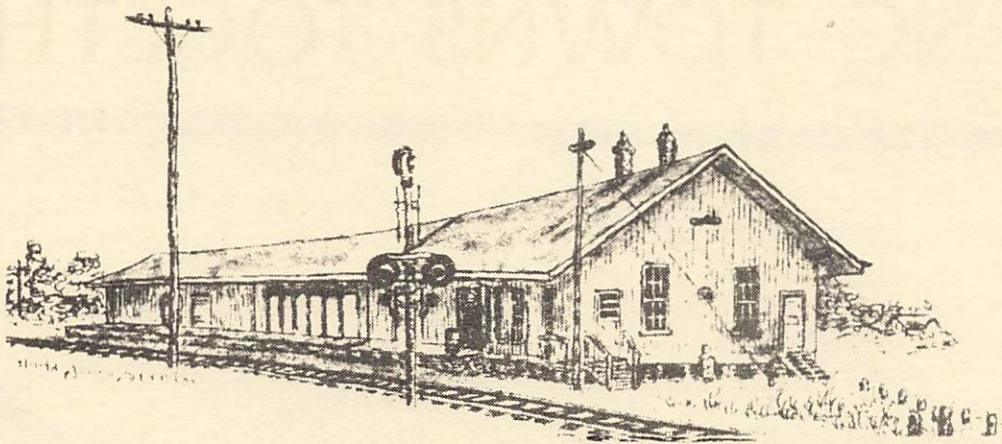


## What is the Atlanta Region?

You could begin by defining the Atlanta Region geographically, pointing out that it includes three-fourths of Georgia, one-third of Tennessee and all of the Carolinas. But such an explanation only indicates where it is--not what it is. To answer the latter question, you need to look at people and places and events and struggles and decisions. You need to stop in at small

towns like Jersey and Navassa and visit urban neighborhoods like White Oak Hills and Hyde Park. And you need to listen to those neighbors who care discussing their hopes and dreams and what they are doing to make them a practical reality. This, perhaps, will tell you something of what the Atlanta Region is. We invite you, in the next few pages, to take such a journey.

# GIBSON: THE FIRST YEAR



As you drive through the sandhills of North Carolina you might go through Gibson. If you do, it is likely that the first thing you will see is the depot, standing yellow and green in the center of town. The depot was donated by the railroad to the town. Over the past year the residents of Gibson have painted, sanded, hammered and nailed, landscaped and furnished the depot to create a community center used nearly every day for small and large meetings, special events and community celebrations. This depot is more than a symbol that a community can renovate a building.

On June 16th the Gibson Human Development Project celebrated its first year's accomplishments. Gibson, a small rural community of approximately 700 people is located in Scotland county. The project was initiated in June 1978 with a two week planning consultation involving members from all parts of the community. At that time, with the assistance of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, the community created a comprehensive socio-economic plan based on a broad consensus of the issues and possible solutions.

Throughout the year this overall plan has been expanded, refocused and implemented through weekly task force meetings called "guilds." The three primary guilds have been Economic Development, Community Life and Living Environment. All ages and groups are

involved in the project through "stake" activities. Stakes are the way the community has divided itself into small geographic sectors so that all can participate in the planning and implementation of the project activities. The town sees itself as a pilot project which could be duplicated in other rural towns throughout the United States.

The accomplishments of the first year have been astonishing. In the area of Economic Development some of the things that have happened are: a new wood crate industry which employs some 50 people, a new restaurant, preliminary plans for major renovation of the downtown area, and a \$142,300 grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. Major planning and work have gone into the area of Living Environment with such things as: repairing the softball field, renovating the depot, painting and refinishing the floors of the community gymnasium and building a family park. Several events have been held which have demonstrated the community's unity. One of these was a Labor Day Parade and Fun Day that drew over 3,000 people. More than 10,000 man-hours of volunteer time have gone into this year's efforts.

The Gibson Station Community Center is a symbol of the entire Human Development Project, demonstrating what any local community can do by working together.

# TYING TOWNS TOGETHER

Holding a Town Meeting can be a great event for any community, but what can happen when several neighboring communities hold Town Meetings and then get together to share insights? During the last two weeks of February this happened to seven communities in the tri-county area surrounding Wilmington, North Carolina.

The communities of Dothan, Leland, Myrtle Grove, Navassa, Oak Island, Southport and Wrightsboro are different in many ways. Some are incorporated, others are not. Some are very closely related to the urban center of Wilmington, while others are still mainly agricultural. Several have local industries and two are tourist centers. One community lacks sewage and adequate housing. Another has major problems of zoning and community representation on governing bodies. Each community used the Town Meeting as a way to focus community wisdom on these issues.

On February 24th representatives of several of these communities gathered at the Wilmington Hilton to "compare notes" and to help each other plan how they could initiate their proposals. The gathering began with refrains from *The Spirit of Wrightsboro* and *Navassa's Gonna Shine* and was followed by renditions of each of the songs created by the communities. Then they talked a-

bout their Town Meetings, what they discovered, where they had similar concerns and what kinds of proposals each had created. They were surprised that although the particulars were different, each was struggling with the same basic things: getting more effective citizen involvement, improving community services, building local leadership and developing economic resources.

The group then focused on implementing their proposals. Each community selected the most important proposal from their Town Meeting and created a kickoff event for it and decided how it would be initiated within a month's period of time. Among the kickoff activities planned were the grand opening of a community center, the renovation of a downtown building during a community workday, an organizational meeting on drainage and a "Trash Away Saturday." They shared their ideas with one another and made suggestions on how to improve each plan. This kind of interchange not only enabled each community to have a plan for really getting a project launched in their own community, but was a reinforcement of what each already knew--it is possible for local citizens themselves to accomplish their hopes and dreams when they work together.

## TOWN MEETING PROGRAM:



# NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDING

If you mention the need for communities or neighborhoods to come together to build plans for their future, you can expect responses like "not another meeting!" or "what good does that do?" Neighborhood level meetings many times turn into opportunities for particular groups or individuals to push their own issues or become verbal fist fights in which very little is accomplished. As a result many community residents avoid public meetings even though they care about their communities.

How to give local citizens a way to get decisions made and launch efforts to renew their community is at the heart of the matter. What does effective local planning, citizen participation and locally initiated programs look like? How does planning and organization become an event for a community that encourages more participation?

Earlier this year a neighborhood in Metropolitan Atlanta, using the Town Meeting format, showed that local men and women can work hard together, get significant decisions made, create a workable plan for their community's development and have a great time doing it all. The Candler-Glenwood Neighborhood Planning Assembly took place over four days, ending with a community workday and celebration.

To see how it happened you would have to begin on Tuesday night, April 3rd, as neighborhood leaders, Candler-Glenwood project staff and ICA staff were in the midst of intense preparation for the next day. They were cutting and preparing banners for each of the 15 block clubs, making posters and putting together workshop packets. The neighborhood leaders' participation in the setup heightened anticipation.

At the opening of the Assembly on the following night, some 100 people gathered, many curious to see what this was all about. Guests who had come

from other states to participate in the Assembly were introduced. At the beginning of the workshop the whole group worked together listing events from the past and their hopes for the future. Then they talked about issues that blocked those hopes and dreams from becoming a reality and decided on the major ones, which were then discussed in small groups. Toward the end of the evening, as the small groups reported on their work, the front wall became filled with statements of the challenges facing the community.

The highlight of the first evening was a surprise. A small group, selected earlier in the evening, used the data from the past events and future hopes and dreams conversation to create a song, symbol and slogan for the neighborhood. The song, entitled *The Neighborhood is Beautiful*, was written to the tune *Everything is Beautiful*.

*Here we are together.*

*We've come a long way.*

*Under the guidance of the Almighty*

*It is now a brighter day.*

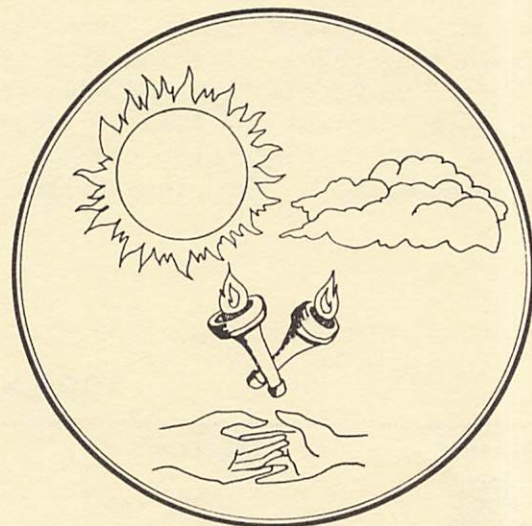
*Onward and upward;*

*Together we stand.*

*With hard work and patience*

*Our better community is at hand.*

The entire group broke out with applause at the conclusion of the song.



During the next day several residents and consultants who had been invited to assist the block clubs looked at the challenges from the night before and began to explore practical ways to deal with them. This gave the second evening's work a very practical and exciting flavor. The suggestions from the group that worked during the day were fed into the large group brainstorm and slowly eleven proposals for action emerged. Locally initiated efforts were proposed that ranged from housing improvements to summer youth programs.

There was a surprise the second night too. Again a small group from the neighborhood worked apart, and this time created a story of the community. *The Farmer John Story* was presented at the end of the evening in a dramatic, humorous form and portrayed the phases of development of the community.

Following the presentation of the proposals, the Assembly selected one proposal to launch on Saturday in a community workday. The arena of concern selected was the commercial development of the Candler-Glenwood intersection. To launch activities and to say to the entire community that practical action would come out of the Assembly, they decided to paint an urban mural at the intersection and beautify the area. Several of the residents commented that this was the first time they had seen so many people of different ages and backgrounds working seriously together.

During the third day a small group, following the workshop procedures to be used that evening, created a detailed plan for the workday and began the preliminary preparation. When the evening opened, the workday plan was presented as a concrete illustration of the method which would be used to create implementation plans for all the proposals. The Assembly then created practical, do-able events to initiate every proposal and encourage larger community involvement. Some were especially imaginative, like the "Lonely House Party" that will advertise the plight of the foreclosed houses in the area.

Saturday was the culmination of the week's work. The newly created community symbol was painted on a wall at the Candler-Glenwood intersection. Then shrubs and flowers were planted and a general cleanup was done of the area. Then a closing potluck dinner was held to celebrate the week's activities. At the celebration everyone was presented with the 31-page document that held all the community's work from the week. This document was a testimony and visible reminder of what they had done. In all, 145 individuals participated in the total process of locally initiated planning and development.

## "moving with unity in love"

What has happened since then? What were some of the implications? A group is now working on a comprehensive recreation and park plan for the community. A carnival was held to raise funds for the recreation programs. The plans are underway for a community road show of dramas and skits to provide education on voting and other community issues. A summer youth job program also has been initiated and a community cleanup day was held.

The Neighborhood Planning Assembly revealed that a community's care is released when residents see practical ways to act. All the surprises during the evening sessions--the song, story, symbol and slogan--were motivating happenings that said something important and different was happening. Residents saw possibility instead of roadblocks. The point of each evening was that local people themselves can determine their major challenges and how to begin local efforts to improve their community. The projects started since the Assembly are a witness to the decisions made by local men and women in the Candler-Glenwood neighborhood to be a community "moving with unity in love," as their new slogan announces.



# MISSISSIPPI 200

Two VISTA's assigned to the South Dekalb Center recently took part in some of the 200 Town Meetings that are being held in Mississippi this year. Michele Myers and Bob Bollenbeck went to Mississippi after helping setup the Candler-Gelwood Neighborhood Planning Assembly. They wanted to better understand the Town Meeting method and its implications for the neighborhood organizing work they are doing in South Dekalb county. When they returned they felt that they had learned how to use the method with local community groups, especially in helping them solve common problems.

Some of the basic things they saw in Mississippi were that people really do care for their communities and want to show this care by action. They experienced a feeling of unity growing among communities in the state as they talk about and work on common problems through the Town Meeting format.

One example of citizen participation and action comes from Gattman, Mississippi, a town of 175, where local people decided to renovate an abandoned one room schoolhouse for a community center. They approached the mayor with their plan and were told that there

were no funds available for such work, but that he would donate the use of an acre of land to be used in whatever way they could. The citizens decided to raise a crop of cucumbers, and their harvest brought them \$1300 for the renovation work. This community now has a newly refurbished meeting place. This seems to be the new spirit of cooperation that is sweeping Mississippi.

Michele Myers says, "The most exciting thing about the trip to me was seeing what communities can do by working together when they've decided what the problems really are. The question of what a whole state can do together is being asked everywhere."

Bob says, "I'm very excited about the Town Meeting methodology and how it can be used with local communities."

This yearlong statewide event is sponsored by the Governor's Office of Citizen Participation in consultation with the Institute of Cultural Affairs. The Town Meetings are being setup with the cooperation of the Mayor's Office in each town. The "Mississippi 200" as it is called will culminate on June 23rd with a statewide assembly where each town will present its document to Mississippi Governor Cliff Finch.



## THE ART OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

*We can do it only if we do it united*

The Town Meeting is a time for a local community to look at its future seriously, but the unexpected always shows up to surprise people. The songs and symbols that are created in each Town Meeting provide this surprise and reveal the deep care and sense of hope that underlie a people's plans and concerns about their future.

A striking thing about many of the symbols created in Town Meetings in the Atlanta Region during the past year was the use of hands. In some cases, as in the town of Myrtle Grove, many hands come together signifying a decision to work together, united. In other cases, such as in Hephzibah, two hands reach out in a handclasp showing cooperation between groups to get a task completed.

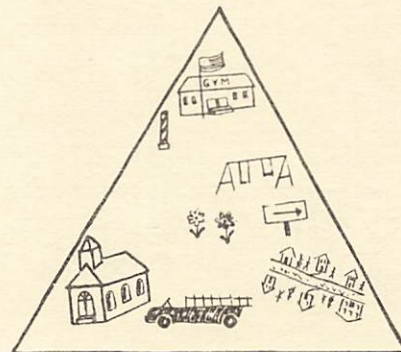
*We're going to build our town;  
we're going to build.  
We don't care about the bills,  
because we have the will.*

Another theme that came up repeatedly was the trust or confidence in a town's own self-reliance to finally see things through. Many local communities saw that it was their own local human resources that would make a difference in effecting any kind of a change. Although apathy came up in many of the challenge statements, the songs and symbols revealed a decision to unite over against that apathy and move in new directions.

*Everyman's dream of a home*

Finally a longing or yearning for a kind of community that any individual anywhere would be glad to live in was expressed many times. This showed up as a hope for a richer quality of life and a sense that the seeds of this already existed in their town and were beginning to bloom. On many symbols the school, a church or a community center pointed to elements of their past or future that made them unique, contributed to the sense of community or represented the struggle to build from nothing. There was excitement remembering the times when the whole town got together to get something done. There was excitement remembering the vitality of the community during these times.

The songs and symbols that local people created revealed that they see their own town or neighborhood as a place to build authentic community. Their hopes and dreams are focused on making it a reality.



# THE WORLD OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

"What if local man got his chance today?"

This question, and perhaps its answer, are the theme of a moving film about people across the world who are working together to build their communities -- Maliwada, India; Oyubari, Japan; El Bayad, Egypt; Kawangware, Kenya; and Sudtonggan, the Philippines. The film portrays both the struggles and the unique sense of fulfillment experienced by local people who are seeing a new day emerge out of their participation in the world of human development.

The film made its debut in the Atlanta region during the month of March and was shown to a variety of small and large audiences in Gibson, Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina; Knoxville, Tennessee; Atlanta and Americus, Georgia; and Charleston, South Carolina. Two Gibson residents, Viola Benfield and James Harris, traveled with ICA staff to present the film. Viola and James also shared with each audience slides of the Human Development Project in Gibson and their own story of how participating in the world of human development has affected their lives and the life of their community. At the close of each film presentation a brief discussion of the film gave the audience an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the film and raise such questions as how people can deal with hopelessness, how local citizens can do their own community development and how service organizations can effectively assist in the initiation of authentic human development.

# IMAGINAL EDUCATION

On a Saturday, when most people take the weekend to rest and relax, representatives from nine private day care centers in South Dekalb county came to a workshop on imaginative curriculum events to stimulate the child's awareness of the world around him.

The teachers worked together designing curriculum that led up to a climax in a school day and would teach children many things around a single theme. Trips to the store and pictures of cows and pigs became lessons in biology and nutrition at the same time. In addition the artform conversation method was demonstrated. This method helps young children reflect upon and understand what happens to them in various kinds of events.

Several weeks later a second session was held to plan this kind of curriculum for a 13 week teaching quarter. The day focused on the total development of the child and was organized around general themes like self-image, "street sense," heritage, basic skills and personal appearance.

During both sessions the teachers got a chance to share insights with the group as a whole and in small groups to discuss ideas and become more familiar with the methods. They found the workshops particularly helpful since the methods were not only presented, but each person had an opportunity to use them. Several teachers said that this had been a rare opportunity for South Dekalb day care teachers to come together, share ideas and work together.

# OPPORTUNITIES

## COMMUNITY YOUTH FORUM

During the initiation of Town Meeting programs, concerns related to youth and their involvement in the community came up frequently. Many people asked if we had something that could help the younger generation get involved. In response to this concern, the ICA developed the Community Youth Forum. During this 5-hour program high school aged youth look at their own vocation through a workshop on the future and then plan practical projects that they can do to address real local needs. This program has been used in high schools and youth clubs and in community and church youth groups.

## GLOBAL WOMEN'S FORUM

A community's greatest resource is its people. Global Women's Forum is designed to tap and refine part of that resource. The Forum does not presuppose the specific issues or opinions of any specific groups. It is designed so that women of all ages and backgrounds can discuss in depth concerns that touch their lives daily and decide as a group what would be helpful ways to care for those concerns. Global Women's Forum is a great way for busy women to evaluate how they use their time. It is also a fine opportunity for women who would like to get involved to decide where they could best serve their community. Women's organizations and communities have used this forum to stimulate motivation and increase participation.

## ECONOMIC COMMUNITY FORUM

The Economic Community Forum is a time designed for busy merchants and businessmen to come together to look at the local economic development of their own community. This is a time when "you are your own expert" and focus on local economic challenges and practical directions. This is a good program for Chambers of Commerce, merchants asso-

ciations, local industrial associations and residents who are concerned about the economic development of their community.

## COMMUNITY ISSUE FORUM

There are times when a community has reached a consensus to move on a particular issue, but has not determined how best to get things going. This is when a Community Issue Forum can be helpful. Using the same format as the regular Town Meeting, community residents can focus their wisdom on the particular challenges related to a major issue and design practical steps to accomplish their goal. The Community Issue Forum can focus on such concerns as education, downtown beautification, health, starting a volunteer fire department and the like.

## INTENSIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

The ICA offers several forms of intensive training in community development. These programs were developed out of experience in Human Development projects, Town Meetings, and community training events around the world. The Human Development Training School and the Global Academy are both eight week programs that give extensive background in the methods developed and used by the ICA over the past 25 years. The Human Development Training School is held at the site of a Human Development Project. Here the project community becomes a living example of what can be done. School participants both see what residents of the project community have done and also work with them applying the methods learned in the School. The Global Academy is a more formal training program held in Chicago that treats academic and practical methods, providing courses in such diverse arenas as world cultures and how to do a Town Meeting. Also available is a one year volunteer program where concerned individuals can live and work in a Human Development Project and experience firsthand the drama of village development and the methods that enable it.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs is a not-for-profit research, demonstration and training group concerned with the human factor in world development. The ICA staff and consultants in 47 American cities work with local groups to coordinate program development and provide methods, training and follow-up services. The ICA is supported by foundations, corporations, concerned individuals and government agencies.

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