

Naturally Meramec  
Dent County Meeting  
June 19, 2015--10:00 a.m.  
Ozarks Natural and Cultural Resource Center, Salem, MO

**Attendees:** Tabatha Utley, Sherry Lea, Kim Shelton, Stan Podorski, Joe Devall, Dennis Purcell, Sara Massengale, Chris Mathes, Kary Winthrop, Tara Peters Tyler McConnell, Andrew Sheelay, Josh Gordon, Darrell Skiles, and Jim and Joan Sample.

**Welcome:** Connie Willman, MRPC, welcomed attendees, introduced Lyle Thomas, and thanked host Bob Thompson.

**Ozarks Natural and Cultural Resource Center:** Bob Thompson and Sara Massengale presented information on the Center. The ONCRC was created to provide information about natural and cultural opportunities for learning and recreational experience, while promoting responsible resource stewardship. The building where ONCRC is housed was originally a car dealership. The Craig family purchased the building, made it a cash and carry business, and later donated the property to the Salem Area Community Betterment Association for community development purposes. In 2005, the Center opened as a result of a request from the Ozark National Scenic Riverways for more extensive information on the riverways as visitors approach the park from the north. Currently, the ONCRC offers hands-on workshops and free exhibits that celebrate the heritage and culture of the Ozark region.

**Tabatha Utley** represented the Salem Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber currently has over 200 members. They work to promote local businesses and events.

**Sherry Lea**, executive director of the Council for a Healthy Dent County, reported that the group is working with local farmers markets. They are raising funds to complete renovation of a building for a Community Center that will provide recreational and health benefits for all ages.

**Kim Shelton** also represented Healthy Dent County. She reported that they are currently working with the Healthy Schools Program, looking for ways to promote local foods programs not only in the schools, but in the community as a whole.

**Stab Podorski** is manager of the KSMO radio station. The station is interested in promoting community programs and will help get the word out about Naturally Meramec.

**Joe Devall** owns and operates the Silver Arrow Canoe Rental. Most of the business for Silver Arrow comes from St. Louis and Kansas City area. Joe is interested in the marketing aspects of Naturally Meramec.

**Dennis Purcell**, Dent County Associate Commissioner, is also on the Dent County Tourism Committee. The committee works to bring tourists into the area. Currently, tourism brings in about \$12 million annually to the county. Dennis is interested in how the marketing of Naturally Meramec will increase tourism in Dent County.

**Sara Massengale** is with University of Missouri Extension. The MU Extension office in Dent County is located on at the Judicial Building in Salem. Services include, but are not limited to, educational sessions (covering topics in agriculture, natural resources, lawn and garden, etc.), professional consultation (to answer specific questions for individual situations) and testing (canner gauges, soil).

**Chris Mahes** is on the board of the Salem Area Community Betterment. This group is a 501(c)3 that guides community development so that time and effort go further and benefit everyone. They have a standing committee that works to assist area farmers' markets.

**Katy Winthrop** owns and operates the Bread Barn Bakery. The bakery, located at 3363 Hwy. H, Salem, features handmade pastries and breads. Katy uses as many local products in her breads as possible. She commented that Dent County is less restrictive on sales of local products than Georgia, where she lived previously.

**Tara Peters** owns and operates Pete's Pumpkin Patch in Rolla. The farm features a corn put, petting zoo, wagon rides, a tubular tire patch, barrel cars and a bounce house. She and her husband are interested in adding a farm to table restaurant to the property next year, and are interested in increasing their market area.

**Tyler McConnell and Andrew Sheelay** work for the Salem News. The newspaper will be a vital means of communicating Natural Meramec's message.

**Josh Gordon** is with Ozark Kings, LLC. This group is working to promote the fishing areas in Dent County. Currently, they are organizing the Triple Crown event, which will feature fishing contests on the Current and Meramec rivers.

**Jim and Joan Sample** own and operate the Meramec Bison Farm. They currently have about 110 bison and sell the meat across Missouri and Arkansas. They are interested in expanding their market area.

**Darrell Skiles** is Dent County Presiding Commissioner. Darrell is interested in Naturally Meramec as a means to promote tourism in the area.

**Naturally Meramec Background:** Connie Willman reviewed the Naturally Meramec project. Staff have been working to finance the project for about four years, following a discussion of the MRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Advisory Committee presentation by Peter Hoeffher, CEO of the St. James Winery. The need for a consortium of agriculture/tourism businesses that crossed "silos" was identified. The project was funded this year by the USDA Rural Development Farmer's Market Promotion Program and the Delta Regional Authority. The purpose of the project is to provide a forum for agriculture and tourism businesses to meet together to discuss ways they can use and market each other's products/services.

**Needs:** Staff asked attendees to share the top three needs of their businesses, with which Naturally Meramec may be able to help. Responses follow:

1. Need for marketing.
2. Need for marketing financing.
3. Need a database of connections and potential customers
4. Need food safety and regulations training.
5. Need to expand markets to larger areas (regional/state)

**Agriculture/Tourism Database:** Staff have completed a database of Dent County agriculture and tourism businesses that they will share with attendees. Attendees were asked to check their information for accuracy and to check the list for any other corrections or missing agriculture/tourism businesses.

**Adjourn:**