

Maine Rural Development Council

Island Community Listening Program

Great Cranberry Island

Thursday, September 21, 2000

Representatives from the Maine Rural Development Council came earlier than expected to Great Cranberry Island today because their planned first stop at Frenchboro was cancelled due to the unexpected illness this morning of Frenchboro Selectman David Lunt.

So, instead of stopping at Frenchboro first, the Council and their guests from various state and federal agencies came on the *Sunbeam* directly to the Great Cranberry Island Town Dock around 10:45 a.m. It took quick thinking on behalf of Beverly Sanborn and her helpers to meet this sudden change of plans.

Members of the MRDC delegation included representatives of USDA-Rural Development; Department of Economic and Community Development; Maine Center for Women, Work, and Community; Coastal Enterprises, Inc.; Eastern Maine Development Corporation; and the Island Institute, as well as Community Action Program agencies from the coastal counties.

After everyone was transported to the Fire Hall for a quick orientation, different groups set out to visit the Affordable Housing Project's two houses, the Stainton's Cranberry Island Boatyard, the Library, and the Historical Museum.

Around 12:30 everyone converged on the Fire Hall again for a delicious lunch of haddock chowder (or chicken soup) with lasagne and salad -- followed by some scrumptious home-baked desserts.

Then the group set to work in earnest. To a house filled with both Great Cranberry and Islesford faces, MRDC executive director Bob Ho summarized the intended purpose of the meeting:



1. To deepen understanding of the issues and needs confronting Maine's island communities.
2. To think strategically about what the Council and the Islanders can do *together*, and
3. To identify immediate opportunities to better serve these communities.

When Mr. Ho threw the floor open to discussion, two Islesford School students read cogent essays on the future of the islands; both emphasized the need for more (affordable) housing, and better transportation and emergency health care on the islands.

After the ice was broken, one by one islanders took the microphone and spoke of their own hopes and aspirations for the future of the islands. Some foresaw the islands as future "bedroom communities" -- if only earlier morning boats and later evening boats could be put on.

Others spoke of the encouragement of work-at-home type "cottage industries" such as bookkeeping, writing, or merchandising via the Internet, which would require improved

telephone and Internet connectivity.

Others again wanted outside venture capital to start a fresh industry on the island, such as frozen lobsters, while yet others pointed out that a combination of all of these would be the wisest course.

The meeting was not without a little excitement when one or two islanders doubted the use of having any meeting at all, and saw no future other than "like now, only worse."

In the end, of course, everyone who wanted to speak had their say, and some positive results will come from this meeting -- first because it got most participants to thinking about their island's future instead of just letting it happen, and second because it shows that there **IS** hope and effective assistance available, both advisory and monetary, if only we can determine just what it is we want to do for our island's future.

-Commentary by Bruce Komusin
