

Dates to Remember

- **Microenterprise Council of Maryland Quarterly Meeting**, June 19, Frederick Community College.
- **Maryland Municipal League Convention**, June 25-27, in Ocean City.
- **FORVM Rural Telecommunications Access Meeting**, Aug. 2, Annapolis
- **Maryland Association of Counties Summer Conference**, Aug. 15-18, in Ocean City.

FORVM FOR RURAL MARYLAND

April/May/June 2001
Volume 1, Issue 2

Maryland's Rural Development Council

We're having a rural summit!

*Rural leaders and advocates across Maryland
to discuss issues and concerns. Don't miss it!*



For perhaps the only time during the year, rural leaders across the State will meet at the Maryland Rural Summit, October 25-26 in Rocky Gap, to talk about health care, economic development, infrastructure, agriculture, housing and community development, resource-based industries — all the issues they deal with throughout the year but have few opportunities to discuss with their peers and counterparts in other parts of the State.

Federal, state and local officials, elected and otherwise, along with leaders from nonprofit and for-profit organizations and academic institutions have met together the past three years to stay on top of the latest issues facing their communities.

This year, the two-day, one-night Summit will include an intense but enjoyable series of seminars, offered on two content tracts. One tract will focus on economic and community development while the other focuses on rural health care. Participants can choose one tract or mix-and-match workshops as they please.

In addition, the Annual Rural Awards Dinner will provide some fun, relaxation and important networking opportunities while honoring those who work hard to make a difference in Maryland's tucked-away rural communities.

Call for Proposals: The FORVM invites you to submit a workshop proposal, telling us what issue or topics you

**4th Annual
2001 Maryland
Rural Summit
October 25-26, 2001
Rocky Gap, MD**

want to learn more about. Our program planning committee will review each idea fully and try to reach a consensus on which workshops to offer. Deadline for submitting proposals is Aug. 2.

Call for Artists: We're looking for some home-grown talent (preferably from a rural community) to entertain at the Rural Awards Dinner. If you're a performer looking for an audience or know of one who is, please tell us about them. Application deadline is Aug. 2.

Call for Sponsors: We have a variety of sponsorship opportunities that can help your organization let rural leaders know that you support their efforts to improve the lives of more than a million Marylanders. Deadline is September 4. Call 410-767-6518.

See Page 7 for more information on how to submit ideas!

Summit Central

www.ruralforum.state.md.us
www.ruralforum.state.md.us
www.ruralforum.state.md.us

Our website has the most current information about the Summit available, as well as all registration forms and program agendas. Please check it often.

FORVM earns national award!

The FORVM for Rural Maryland received the 2001 Rural Impact Award from the National Rural Development Partnership during the group's annual conference in Washington, D.C. in April. The FORVM was recognized for helping to establish the Microenterprise Council of Maryland, a nonprofit organization dedicated to very small business development; and the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund, which provided almost \$350,000 in grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations for the first time last year. This year, \$422,000 has been allocated to the fund. The FORVM thanks all its Maryland partners for contributing to this success.

Newsletter

18 rural-serving nonprofits receive almost \$350,000; up to \$422,000 in grants is available in FY 2002.

Applications for next year's grants will be available in mid-summer

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BPW approves grants for rural nonprofit organizations

Rural-serving nonprofits received almost \$350,000 in grants from the recently established Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund, which the FORVM -- working with rural legislators and Gov. Glendening -- helped create.

In FY 2002, the fund will distribute \$422,000 in grants. The FORVM and the Department of Business and Economic Development will again this year administer the application process. Information about next year's application process will be posted on the FORVM's website in July.

The Board of Public Works approved the following grant awards last February.

Grants to be administered by the Dept. of Agriculture: \$171,000

■ **Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, Inc.** — To reduce the expense of operating three mobile Ag in the Classroom units and equip a new one. Includes teaching materials.

■ **LEAD Maryland: Maryland's Ag Leadership Development Program** — To offset the cost of educational seminars in problem solving and leadership skills for emerging leaders in agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.

■ **Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts** — To support curriculum development and distribution of the Maryland Envirothon Program, a high school environmental education competition that uses the expertise of natural resource professionals to teach students about their natural resources.

■ **Carroll Community College / Agriculture Advanced Technology Center** — To support the ATC's efforts to train new agribusinesses and

horticulture businesses and to incorporate technology into their business operations.

■ **Garrett Community College / Alternative Agriculture ATC** — To help the ATC provide local landowners an opportunity to explore alternative ag business and development enterprises.

■ **Delmarva Advisory Council** — To support the new Delmarva Agribusiness Council, a forum for the region's farmers, processors, marketers, transporters, environmental organizations, consumers, ag suppliers, etc. to form partnerships across product lines and state boundaries.

■ **The Chesapeake Fields Institute** -- To develop a business plan that preserves farmland on the Eastern Shore by developing business parks for farmers and developing agricultural products to fit regional market niches.

■ **Future Harvest, Inc. / A Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture** — To communicate with rural communities about new farm-to-market tools and techniques, such as farmers markets, pick-your-own operations, roadside stands, and direct selling.

■ **Maryland Organic Food & Farming Association** — To study the feasibility of establishing certified organic slaughterhouses and grain mills that would assist the new certified organic animal products industry get their products ready for market.

Grants to be administered by the Department of Business and Economic Development: \$138,000

■ **Maryland Rural Development Corporation** — To be used for technical assistance, training and capacity development in low-income rural communities and to improve water and

waste systems.

■ **Maryland Rural Water Association** — To pay half the cost of a sewer camera and related equipment that identifies inflow and infiltration problems in small wastewater systems.

■ **Tri-County Council for Western Maryland, Inc.** — To support a municipal assistance "circuit rider" program in western Maryland.

■ **Maryland Rural Health Association** — To develop and implement a strategic plan concerning rural health care access and to support rural health information coordination and dissemination activities.

■ **Maryland Center for Community Development** — To offer technical assistance and training programs in rural communities and to increase the capacity of rural economic and community development organizations.

Grants to be administered by the Dept. of Natural Resources for Forestry Education and Rural Fire Suppression: \$38,000

■ **Maryland Forests Association, Inc.** — To be used to develop and distribute the "Maryland Forests Forever" program and to distribute materials to all middle school science teachers in the state.

■ **Maryland Eastern Shore RC&D Council, Inc.** — To install 12 dry fire hydrants throughout the Eastern Shore.

■ **Southern Maryland RC&D Council, Inc.** — To install 12 dry fire hydrants in Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties.

■ **Western Maryland RC&D Council, Inc.** — To study fire response time in Carroll County and to install two dry fire hydrants in each of the following counties: Garrett, Allegany, Washington, Frederick and Carroll.

Meet the USDA's new State RD Director

Elliott to lead USDA's rural development efforts in state

The Bush Administration recently appointed Marlene B. Elliott to serve as the State Director for U.S. Department of Agriculture - Rural Development for Maryland and Delaware. She is also the FORVM's newest Executive Board Member, representing the federal government.

As the state director, Ms. Elliott directs the Rural Development mission for housing, community facility, business, and water and waste loan and grant programs for Maryland and Delaware.

USDA Rural Development serves as the lead federal entity for rural development needs, and administers program assistance through three agencies: Rural Housing Services, Rural Business – Cooperative Services, and Rural Utilities Service.

Ms. Elliott grew up on a family farm near Laurel, DE, graduated as valedictorian of her class at Laurel High School, and subsequently graduated from Delaware Technical and Community College and Salisbury State University with a major in Business Administration.

Her career in public service began in 1982 when she joined the staff of former U.S. Sen. William V. Roth, Jr. She served with the Senator through the end of his term and be-

came Roth's State Director, responsible for his Delaware offices and staff. She coordinated constituent relations activities, managed special projects and conferences, and served as community liaison with the public and private sectors.

"I have known and worked with Marlene for more than 18 years," said Delaware Congressman Mike Castle, who nominated her for the post. "She is dedicated, hard-working and most importantly, she knows the issues and the needs of rural Americans and how best to improve their quality of life."

Ms. Elliott was named one of the Outstanding Young Women of America in 1982, was the 1985 Delaware Young Careerist for Delaware Business and Professional Women, was inducted into the Delaware Tech Walk of Success in 1993, and was a 2001 honoree for International Women's Day.

She is a past president of the Georgetown-Millsboro Rotary Club, a member of the Laurel Chamber of Commerce, a Board member of the Delaware Agriculture Museum, an honorary commander at the Dover Air Force Base and a member of the Delaware Tech Educational Foundation Council. She is active in numerous other community activities. She continues to make her home on a farm near Laurel.

Microenterprise Council of Maryland:

MEGA grants announced at next training session

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Secretary Ray Skinner will be joined by Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) Deputy Secretary Sandra Long to announce the first round of Microenterprise Grant Assistance (MEGA) recipients at the next meeting of the Microenterprise Council of Maryland on Tuesday, June 19, starting at 10 a.m. at Frederick Community College.

The Microenterprise Grant Assistance Program, which provides a total of \$100,000, is a cooperative program sponsored by the DHCD, DBED and the Microenterprise Council of Maryland. The program provides grants of \$5,000 to \$35,000 to existing intermediary organizations offering microenterprise training, technical assistance, and/or micro-

loans to Maryland residents starting or expanding a microenterprise. Local governments who provide these services in areas not served by a nonprofit were also eligible.

The Microenterprise Council, a nonprofit organization the FORVM helped create last year (with strong support from Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend), serves those providers who help very small businesses, called microenterprises – that is, those with five or fewer employees and a capitalization need of \$25,000 or less.

In addition to the grant announcement, two separate training opportunities will be offered for new or expanding microenterprise practitioner support organizations (i.e., nonprofits or local governments). An introductory

course on Microenterprise will also be held from 10:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. for those who are new or wanting to join the field. Another session will be held for those presently providing services but who need more information on best practice guidelines, etc.

The MCM recently hired its first Executive Director, Mikal McCartney, in January. Since then, the organization has started a quarterly newsletter and published its first promotional brochure. If you are interested in receiving these publications or are interested in learning more about the MCM, contact Mikal at 410-553-9751 or email at: Mikal@gcnetmail.net Also, keep an eye out for a new website expected online soon at: www.micromaryland.org



Updates:

FORVM Working Committees tackling tough issues

The FORVM's Executive Board created several Working Committees last year to more effectively address the plethora of public policy issues affecting Rural Maryland. These problem-addressing committees are made up of Executive Board members, interested rural citizens, and officials from affected government agencies, advocacy groups and academia. Committees study issues that affect rural areas and work toward solutions without duplicating the efforts of other agencies or organizations. Ultimately, the committees provide information, suggestions, and recommended positions on issues that impact Rural Maryland. Here is an update of what those committees did recently.

If you are interested in serving on a committee, please call the FORVM Office at 410-767-6531.

Health Care Committee to look at cancer funding and transportation issues

Chairman: Michael Spurrier, director, Frederick Community Action Agency

The Health Care Working Committee, which met in Frederick during April, has formed two subcommittees to take on two important tasks during the year ahead.

The Subcommittee on Health Transportation will work with the State Office of Primary Care and Rural Health and other organizations to analyse and improve transportation services to health care facilities for rural patients. The subject will also be one of the topics addressed at the Rural Summit this fall.

Rural communities do not have easily accessible public transportation that residents can use to get to their family doctors or to specialized treatment outside their communities. In Frederick, for instance, the county transportation system requires 48 hours notice to transport a patient and even more notice to transport out of the county. Meanwhile, many entities — such as nursing homes, assisted care facilities and even some employers — use their own vehicles or contract out for transportation services.

The committee will try to determine the scope of the transportation issue and develop a model that streamlines services

in an affordable and beneficial way.

“Rural Maryland has to stay on top of transportation issues because larger urban counties truly don’t understand our problems,” said Del. Louise Snodgrass who represents Frederick County and is a member of the FORVM Board. “We in rural areas lack the necessary resources and we really do have different needs.”

The Subcommittee on Tobacco Restitution will work with county health officers to develop a funding formula that provides rural communities with a stable, base amount of funding from the Restitution Fund.

In Talbot County, for instance, the county health department must share its \$40,000 allocation with the public schools and police department before it can begin fundings its tobacco awareness and cancer screening programs. That figure will be different -- probably lower -- next year. Even in a small county, \$40,000 doesn’t go very far.

The committee will also compare cancer rates with the amount of money each county, rural or not, receive.

Related health news: Rural health gets higher profile

Under a recent reorganization, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has renamed the State Office of Rural Health to the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, according to Patricia Boehm, assistant director of DHMH’s newly restructured Office and member of the FORVM’s Health Care Working Committee.

The reorganization is designed to lead to more visibility for rural health issues and better communication among rural stakeholders, said Ms. Boehm.

The Office of Primary Care and Rural Health has established quarterly regional meetings to identify issues and open up communication with local providers and citizens across the state. From those meetings, she said, the State Office will work with communities to develop solutions. The next schedule of meetings is shown below:

- Upper Eastern Shore, Fri., June 15, Kent County Public Library, 408 High Street, Chestertown;
- Southern Maryland, Tues., June 19, Charles County Public Library LaPlata Branch, 2 Garrett Ave. LaPlata;
- Western Maryland, Wed., June 20, Western Maryland AHEC, 11 Columbia Street Cumberland;
- Lower Eastern Shore, Fri., June 22, Community Health Education Center, 11107 Race Track Rd. Ocean Pines.

FORVM Working Committee Updates

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Housing & Community Development Committee joins with DHCD to help rural families

Chairman: Duane Yoder, President, Garrett Community Action Agency

Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Ray Skinner and several rural housing leaders met several times during the last few months to determine which federal programs rural communities can use to receive funding to rehabilitate existing housing stock.

During the last year, DHCD began interpreting Smarth Growth regulations in such a way as to prohibit grants or loans from being awarded and distributed for low-income residents to purchase or rehabilitate existing single-family houses in rural communities because they were considered "growth related" projects under the Priority Funding Area regulations and thus ineligible for funding. To limit suburban sprawl and protect open spaces, only growth-related projects in "priority funding areas" can receive state dollars. Many rural communities and existing homesites are located outside PFAs.

Housing committee members identified the inability to receive help rehabilitating existing structures as a major problem (and unintended outcome of the PFA law) when they were surveyed last November to identify the issues that the committee most needed to address. A subcommittee was formed to work collaboratively with DHCD and the rural delegations of the General Assembly to identify programs that could be used without adversely affecting the good intentions of the PFA law.

After several in-depth meetings, the subcommittee and Secretary Skinner identified 16 different programs, which can provide funds to rehabilitate existing rural housing. Secretary Skinner has since altered DHCD regulations and opened those programs up to rural hous-

ing organizations. Legislation was also enacted that clarified how federal funds may be used.

Housing Committee Chair Duane Yoder, who was among those who worked on the solution, thanked Secretary Skinner and his staff for working so cooperatively to find a solution to this problem. The Committee plans to meet again with DHCD staff on June 20.

Infrastructure Committee to study small water systems

**Chairman: William Don Bradley,
Mayor, Town of Hurlock**

The Infrastructure Working Committee met in Ocean City in April in conjunction with the Maryland Rural Water Association's annual meeting.

After much discussion, the committee decided to focus on the infill and infiltration sewerage problem faced by many small rural cities and towns. The Maryland Department of the Environment, under order from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has begun fining small communities \$1,000 per day for violations many rural communities have no financial ability to correct.

The committee decided to establish an Infill and Infiltration (I and I) Sewerage Technical Study Subcommittee to work on the problem. Since then, however, the committee has learned that the Governor recently announced the formation of a Task Force on Upgrading Sewerage Systems, which is charged with reviewing the status of systems statewide. The committee will work in conjunction with the task force to ensure that rural communities are appropriately included in the discussion.

Ag & Natural Resources Committee to develop important ag data

**Acting Chair: Stephen McHenry,
Executive Director, The FORVM**

The Ag and Natural Resources Working Committee met in Annapolis in April to receive several updates on the legislative session.

FORVM Executive Director Steve McHenry told members that the work of the Resource-Based Industry Task Force was extended another year and two new regional development councils were created on the Eastern Shore. (See stories on page 6.) Also, the Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund, which provides grants to rural-serving nonprofits, received an allocation of \$422,000 - up from the \$350,000 allocated last year. (See story on page 2)

The committee also heard an update from the Maryland Food Center Authority on its efforts to establish a business incubator program that would include a state-of-the-art kitchen facility and technical assistance and training for farmers interested in using the facility to prepare value added products. Although funding has still not been secured, the Center continues to refine its marketing and operational strategies.

After a long discussion on several topics, the committee created a subcommittee to determine a county-by-county breakdown of the impact that agriculture has on local rural economies. The committee has been working to include agriculture and resource-based industries in local and statewide business economic development plans; however, without good data showing the enormous impact those industries have on rural communities, support has been slow in coming.

In addition, without strong resource-based industries in rural communities, ag land and open spaces that the State is trying to protect will come under

**Ag Committee,
Continued on page 6**

Millions of federal dollars at stake

Governor, General Assembly create two regional planning councils on Shore

These councils will increase the Shore's ability to obtain funding for regional economic development efforts

Millions of federal dollars in economic development aid have been flowing right past Maryland and into Virginia, all because Maryland didn't have regional development councils in place to catch it.

That fly-by of money stops here.

The Governor and General Assembly recently created and funded two new regional councils on the Eastern Shore that will facilitate regional planning and development efforts, and pump up funding for two existing councils, all in a push for more rural economic development and regional cooperation.

House Bill 1087 created the Lower Shore Tri-County Council, comprised of Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties. Similar bills (HB 1088 and SB 889) created the Mid-Shore Regional Council, comprised of Dorchester, Caroline and Talbot counties.

These councils will provide more opportunity for regional coordination and cooperation, and increase the Shore's ability to obtain funding from the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) — funding which it now misses out on due to a lack of appropriate regional planning.

Governor Glendening and the General Assembly allocated \$100,000 to each of the new councils to get started. The EDA has kicked in \$75,000 with another \$50,000 coming from the state Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED).

In addition, the Tri-County Council for Western Maryland will receive an ad-

ditional \$160,000 from the state, to the \$40,000 it currently receives, which is what the Southern Tri-County Council now receives. By FY 2003, each of the four regional councils will receive \$200,000 in base state funding.

On the Eastern Shore, each represented county is required to allocate \$10,000 to the council that represents them. In Western and Southern Maryland, counties have contributed as well.

The new regional councils are an outgrowth of the work done by the Governor's Eastern Shore Economic Development Task Force, which recommended the creation of the councils as part of a broader economic development strategy. The FORVM provided technical assistance to the task force and is currently working with local leaders on the Eastern Shore and with DBED officials to get the councils organized and operational by July.

Creating these councils was the major focus of the FORVM's work during the last several months. Thanks go to the Governor, DBED Secretary David Iannucci and his staff, the Eastern Shore Delegation (especially Del. Norm Conway, Del. Charles McClenahan, Del. Addie Eckardt and Sen. Rich Colburn), as well as officials from various counties for their support.

Ag Committee, continued from page 5

more and more development pressure and risks being lost forever. The committee hopes to develop accurate data related to job creation/retention and dollars spent in local communities as a result of local resource-based industries in order to garner the support they need to keep those industries thriving in an increasingly global economy.

Resource Based Industry Task Force extended a year

The General Assembly extended the life of the Task Force on Resource Based Industry in Maryland for another year, until January 31, 2002, and added the Maryland Food Center Authority (MFCA) and three economic development officials from rural communities to the membership (House Bill 165 / Senate Bill 127).

In its interim report last January, the task force recommended that the MFCA, a state agency, consider becoming a financing and technical assistance authority for agriculture and resource-based industries; however, the task force also reported that it did not have enough time to come up with specific recommendations for the Governor and General Assembly on how that authority should be created and structured. In addition, the task force plans to work with the Department of Business and Economic Development to see if its financing programs can be made to work better for the agriculture, forestry and seafood industries. The task force also recommended that resource based industries be included in county economic development plans

The task force, which is co-chaired by Sen. Mac Middleton and Del. Charles McClenahan, plans to meet through the summer and come up with its final recommendations late in the Fall.

The task force is an outgrowth of work done by the FORVM's Working Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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2001 Rural Development & Health Care Awards

WANTED: Hometown heros

Individuals and organizations in rural communities will be recognized for their outstanding rural development efforts during the 2001 Rural Awards Dinner to be held Oct. 25 in Rocky Gap and sponsored by The FORVM for Rural Maryland, the Maryland Rural Health Association and the Maryland DHMH Office of Primary Care and Rural Health.

■ **Outstanding Rural Economic Development:** Program, project or organization that successfully attracts, retains or creates jobs in at least one rural county. Award criteria: Significance of jobs attracted, retained or created in relation to a community's economic development objectives; noteworthy, creative, or innovative techniques brought to bear on challenging economic development situations; and the use of partnerships for leveraged resources in achieving business development goals.

■ **Outstanding Rural Community Development:** Program, project or organization that substantially improves the quality of life in at least one rural community. Award criteria: dedication and creativity in providing community-oriented service(s); evidence of collaboration with relevant stakeholders to resolve social problem(s); and the use of partnerships or leveraged resources to realize community-achievement goals.

■ **Outstanding Legislator Award:** For outstanding leadership in promoting legislation to benefit rural communities. Award criteria: demonstrated wisdom and foresight in dealing with rural issues; and an understanding of and exemplary leadership in addressing rural needs.

■ **Outstanding Rural Health Program:** Promotes and provides effective

community-oriented rural health care delivery and excels in service to rural people, directly or indirectly. Award criteria: quality of service; dedication and creativity in providing services to the community that leads to improved access to care; coordination of care; promotion of networking among rural providers; and promotion of interdisciplinary health care delivery.

■ **Outstanding Rural Health Achievement:** For leadership and noteworthy initiative in the development of community-oriented rural health care delivery. Award criteria: distinctive efforts to promote and/or improve rural health care; leadership; involvement in the community; and lasting contributions to health care.

■ **Outstanding Rural Health Practitioner:** Provides direct service and exhibits outstanding leadership in bringing and/or improving health services to rural populations. Award criteria: provision of outstanding care; collaboration and teamwork; involvement in the community; and lasting contribution to the rural health care system.

A Call for Help!

We're excited about this year's Rural Summit but we need your help!

If you have a good idea for a workshop topic related to rural economic or community development or health care that could benefit leaders throughout the state. . .

OR

If you are a performer, or know one, who would like to entertain at our Awards Dinner. . .

OR

If you want to let rural citizens know you care about improving the lives of 1.3 million Marylanders by sponsoring the Summit. . .

Let us know!

Fax your ideas to: 410-333-8314 or contact Communications Manager Vanessa Orlando at: vorlando@mdbusiness.state.md.us or phone 410-767-4779.

(Submittal forms are available on our website, but you may submit ideas anyway you like. Include your name and phone number so we can contact you about your idea if we have questions.)

Thank you for helping us to make this year's Summit the best ever!

Nomination Instructions: To nominate someone for a Rural Development Award, include a cover page with the following information: Award category, nominee's name, nominee's organization, nominee's address, nominee's day and night time phone number, your name, organization and phone numbers. **Nominations must include a narrative, no more than three pages,** that describes the nominee's accomplishments, the significance of his/her work, and how rural people or communities have benefited. You may attach biographical sketches, news articles and other documentation to support this nomination. The information you provide may be used in presenting the award. Send your nominations to: The FORVM for Rural Maryland c/o Awards Committee, 217 E. Redwood Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. Faxes will be accepted at: 410-333-8314. Nomination deadline is September 2, 2001.

*A report to the
FORVM's Health Care
Working Committee*

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Residents covered after MCO pullout

When FreeState, a managed care organization (MCO), pulled out of every place in Maryland except Baltimore city and county late last year, more than 60,000 people — most of them in rural areas — had to find someplace else to go for basic health care, said Shelby Boggs, director of the state Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's HealthChoice program, speaking recently to members of the FORVM's Health Care Working Committee. When Freestate pulled out of Baltimore and the rest of the state earlier this year, another 40,000 people needed new doctors.

Since then, all of those people have been linked up with another MCO.

Sixty-five percent of those initially affected by the Freestate pullout (that is, the rural areas) voluntarily chose another MCO. The rest were assigned to one by DHMH.

The good news, of course, is that by the end of May, everyone affected by the FreeState pullout has a primary care doctor and each region of the state has at least two MCOs to choose from. (Some have four.)

The FreeState pullout affected 64 percent of the market on the Eastern Shore; 15 percent in Southern Maryland; and 25 percent in Western Maryland.

The Health Choice Program, Ms. Boggs reported, is currently working on

the following initiatives:

■ Developing better guidelines on how MCOs deliver dental care. This year, she said, \$24 million was budgeted for MCOs to provide dental services, but those MCOs did not have clear guidelines so much of that money went unspent and services went undelivered.

■ Reviewing network adequacy to determine how many doctors are in the system, where they are, how they work — information that helps HealthChoice assess strengths and weaknesses.

■ Installing at each MCO a "newborn coordinator" to help new parents with questions about their new addition.

■ Conducting a pilot project called the Upper Shore Regional Task Force, in which local residents look at systemic problems with MCOs and work out solutions. If all goes well, the program may go statewide.

In 2002, one of the department's priorities is to address reimbursement rates for providers.



**The FORVM for
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TO!