

School and Community
Projects

L. L. Eckard ✓

This describes an excellent
community undertaking

R.H.

School and Community Projects

My home community of Big Stony Run is located in the foot-hills of the Shenandoah mountain joining the George Washington National Forest. This community is made up of twenty six families which send thirty nine children to the little one room school which I attended.

This community was isolated many days each year, being cut off from, school, church, post office, markets, mills and doctors, by the South Fork River. To make matters worse we had no public highway, but had eleven gates to open and shut when we could get out. Such conditions had an effect that eleven families moved out.

During the flood of 1949 our road along the mountain stream was completely washed away.

The State Road Commission

built us a highway free from gates but we still had the South Fork River to contend with.

With the coming of an open road, our little one room school was moved out to a consolidated school.

Each school term many days were lost due to high water, as the school bus could not travel.

As I was principal of the consolidated school, I was sometimes unable to get to school myself.

I petitioned the State Road Commission to build a highway bridge three different times, but to no avail as funds for such a project were not available. Then the idea of organizing the community and building a bridge entered my mind.

As the road into our little community also enters the George Washington National Forest, I made a trip to Bridgewater, Va.

and had a talk with the forest ranger. He was very much interested and also very cooperative.

The next week he came over and marked us all the timber we needed to build a bridge.

About two weeks before Christmas 1951, I called a meeting at the school house. All the men and boys of the community came. We decided to canvass the people of the community for funds and labor. Almost every one in the community contributed generously. We soon had raised \$850.00. This was to be used in buying cement, steel and nails.

Every able bodied man and boy signed up to work on the bridge every day that they were able until it was finished.

Several days later six of us went to see our State Road Commissioner. He agreed to haul us crushed stone and sand free of charge. He also agreed to furnish us a

shovel, bulldozer, water pump, and a cement mixer if we paid the operator of this machinery. He also agreed to do all filling when the bridge was completed.

The next evening we called another meeting and drew up our plans for the bridge. The bridge was to be 85 feet long. Two end buttresses and two center piers. The width to be 12 ft. Height 10 ft. above water level.

Next we presented our plan to the people who owned the land over which a short connecting link would be built. They were glad to give us a right of way and signed to that effect.

We paid them \$1.00 to make it legal. Next we took it to the clerk's office and had it recorded.

During the holidays between Christmas and New Year, all of us in the community cut and hauled

our timber to the saw-mill on our own trucks.

The sawing of our lumber was free as we did all the work.

By late spring we had our lumber and other timber at the bridge site. The state also had hauled sand and gravel as they agreed to do.

In June 1952 we called a meeting. We ordered 600 sacks of cement to be unloaded from the car at Harrisonburg, Va. by ourselves.

When the car arrived, ten of us with four trucks, hauled the cement and stacked it in several barns. By getting our cement off the car ourselves we saved 10¢ per bag, getting it at 90¢ per hundred pounds.

We decided to start our bridge the last week of July as the water - as a rule is lowest during August.

The first morning at 7:00 twenty two of us were there with, boats, hammers, saws etc.

While the shovel was dipping out for the lutman we were building forms and hauling rocks.

By the end of the first week we had one lutman complete with wings and the block for the second poured.

By the end of the third week all the cement work was done and we were all very glad as we had been working eleven hours a day for three weeks.

By using the shovel the twenty one large timbers were easily raised and laid in place.

Then the heavy boards were put in place and nailed down with sledge hammers.

We all worked 23 days to complete the bridge.

When the bridge was complete we had an auction sale of the farm lumber, nails, and several bags of cement. The money from this sale was put with the rest of the money that was left from the donations. This was then returned to the people in proportion to what they had donated.

Every one in the community was very proud of this accomplishment. The women folks came the last day and served us all a big dinner.

We had an old time chicken pot pie cooked in an iron Kettle. One neighbor brought a keg of cider. Every one was happy over a job well done.

By September 1, 1952 we were using our bridge. This has helped to put our community on the map, and everyone says, "How did we get along without it?"

After we had our bridge completed the state took it over and now we are well satisfied.

In 1953 I petitioned the post office department to give us a mail route. This I repeated three times and finally in February 1954 we got our mail route.

We are now able to get the daily mail from Harrisonburg each day at 1:30 o'clock.

By seeing what can be done through cooperation, the people dug 449 holes and cut the right of way which enabled us to now have the Bell telephone system in our community and school.

By putting on an advertising campaign our school has purchased a Bell + Howell movie projector, screen and a stage curtain.

All this proves to me

-9-

that if you want to get things
done, you must get the
backing of the people first.