

## The Success of Saltillo, Tennessee's EPA Brownfields 104(k) Assessment Grant

Saltillo, Tennessee is a small, rural river town in southwest Tennessee, just north of the Alabama border in Hardin County, where the main street dead ends at the Tennessee River. As a river town, Saltillo's population balloons in the summer with boaters, fisherman, and cyclists, but in the off-seasons it is a quiet, small town with a population of 303 people (2010 census).

In 2009, the Saltillo mayor and a staff member attended a US EPA Brownfields 104(k) Grant Writing Workshop hosted by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) and US EPA staff in Jackson, Tennessee. TDEC Division of Remediation (DoR) staff worked closely with the City of Saltillo and the private sector on a Brownfields 104(k) grant application. In 2010, the City was awarded a \$250,000 Brownfields 104(k) Assessment Grant, which was used to complete environmental assessments on several properties in the small town.

These vacant, abandoned and underutilized pieces of property hindered redevelopment and economic expansion in the city. These properties also constitute a significant percentage of available commercial land within the city. Losses in the manufacturing base, particularly the closing of a denim plant that previously made blue jeans, have had profound economic impacts on Saltillo. The brownfields assessment funding from EPA served as a catalyst for redevelopment and re-use in Saltillo.

Prior to completing environmental assessments through the grant, the former county school sat vacant and unused. Being one of the properties the City wanted to focus on, an environmental assessment was done through the grant and asbestos was found to present, but was in stable condition. The asbestos was not friable, thus not posing a risk for the re-use of the building, as long as it was managed adequately. Local community volunteers came together to transform the facility into a senior center. In addition to EPA funding, FEMA provided approximately \$600,000 to transform the lower floor of the facility to a community storm center. In the summer of 2012, the storm shelter and senior center opened. Leveraging these two funding mechanisms, this small town now has a place to serve its residents and provide safe shelter during storms.

Also completed under the US EPA Brownfields 104(k) grant was a visioning session where community members convened and envisioned a future for Saltillo. This visioning session concentrated on the properties assessed under the EPA grant. One of the focuses for the community was a marina ramp connecting the town center to the river. As a result of the visioning session, community volunteers came together and constructed boat slips to allow easier access from the river to the City.



Before the former county school was assessed under the EPA Brownfields 104(k) grant, it sat vacant and unused.



After the EPA Brownfields 104(k) grant and community determination, the former county school is now a community center and storm shelter.



Prior to the EPA Brownfields 104(k) grant being awarded, the marina was closed. With community assistance and ambition, and after the visioning session that was completed under the grant, the marina is now open and the city has boat slips for boaters to dock and visit the City of Saltillo.

