

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

Creating community spirit and dreams in Ellsworth

The flood of '93 hit Ellsworth pretty hard. Then a decade later, the only grocery store closed and it was devastating to the residents. "It sure wasn't a compliment when we qualified for the Horizons program, but Horizons has been amazing for our community of just over 500 people!" said Gina Spohnheimer, an Ellsworth resident on the Horizons organizing committee.

Horizons, directed by Iowa State University Extension and funded by the Northwest Area Foundation, targets communities of less than 5000 residents with more than 10 percent living at poverty level. Horizons helps them build stronger leaders to address economic issues and find ways to implement change.



Ellsworth residents in Horizons study circles identified several things they felt held their community in poverty and kept them from moving towards prosperity. And they took action! A group of 17 youth and eight adults planted flowers in 20 Main Street planters in May. The planters beautify the community, but youth pride from providing service to the community and working with caring adults is an even bigger investment in Ellsworth.

"We are beginning to dream again and we're finding that our best assets are our people," said Spohnheimer. "We have lots to do, but now we know we can do it."

They hope to have community festivals on every Friday the 13th and sponsored a "dump your junk" day. The June "dump you junk" day was arranged so that families could get rid of unwanted furniture and appliances. Eight and a half tons of junk, 68 appliances and 29 tires were removed that day! The Friday, July 13th community street festival brought out over 200 people for free walking tacos and water balloon fun. The event was used to celebrate the beautification and clean-up projects and recognize 27 LeadershipPlenty participants (the Horizons sponsored leadership training).

"This is helping us become a more caring community, because more people know each other." said Spohnheimer. "With each Horizons project the circle of people involved widens and more people are involved in the community."

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– Gina Spohnheimer, Horizons committee

For more information, contact:

Barb Wollan, ISU Extension family resource management specialist – 515-832-9597

Gina Spohnheimer, Ellsworth Horizons committee member – 515-836-4468

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