

Community spirit guides Grand Junction rejuvenation

When Pierre Kellogg moved back to Grand Junction as an adult with a family to raise, he was surprised at the lack of community events and community pride in his childhood home town of 960. He remembered community celebrations and activities that brought people together – and he wanted the town to be like that again. He got involved in Horizons in 2006; so did Fran Teagarden, Joan Tiffany, and David Higgins.

“Before Horizons, many people wanted to see the town make changes, but there was no mechanism to bring them together as a unified group,” said Pierre Kellogg. “Horizons gave us the framework to make changes and helped us understand how poverty was affecting our community. It isn’t just a few; it’s a whole community of people getting involved, bringing new skills and knowledge to make a difference.”

In the 2000 census, Grand Junction showed a poverty rate of 15 percent. Communities of less than 5000 residents, with more than 10 percent living at poverty level, are eligible for the Horizons program directed by Iowa State University Extension with funding from Northwest Area Foundation. Creating a cleaner, safer, healthier town and providing an after-school program that would help children with homework were top priorities that came out of Grand Junction’s Horizons visioning sessions.

Pierre Kellogg received training through Horizons to be a facilitator for the leadership training; he used the skills he developed to run for City Council and now as a councilman he looks at issues from many angles and helps direct compromises as needed. “As a council, we are condemning and removing or tearing down abandoned buildings, but it takes time. It’s a long process, but we are making progress and we can’t stop,” he said.

A report that Grand Junction students tested among the state’s lowest on standardized test motivated Joan Tiffany into action. She recruited 30 volunteers, half of them Horizons participants, to be tutors for first through fifth grade students. The volunteers take turns two afternoons a week for an hour and a half, helping with homework and directing extra reading, learning games, and physical activities. They started the tutoring program in March, have received funding for next school year and plan to run the program from mid-September through April.

“The parents are pleased that the children are getting their homework done,” Tiffany said. “And students that once left school at the end of the day feeling discouraged are leaving with completed homework, smiles on their faces, and a few more adults that care about their progress.”

Fran Teagarden is a member of the Naked Ladies Garden Club – a club that brings ladies from all parts of community together to reach out and be there for each other and the town. “We aren’t so much gardening experts as we are willing to work side-by-side for the community, whether it’s planting flowers, putting together a fund-raiser or just sharing some time with each other.” The club has planted community strawberry beds near the town library and members are active in many volunteer efforts in town.

As a Greene County Extension council member, David Higgins was a likely candidate to promote Horizons in his home town. He recruited people to initial meetings in 2006 and continues to propel the cause forward. “We have formed a nonprofit group called Grand Junction Horizons and are receiving major contributions to continue rebuilding our community,” he said. “Up to now, we have counted on personal and business donations to fund our community-wide cleanup days, town celebrations, and paint for building restorations. The nonprofit status will help us sustain the momentum we have going.”

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July 2008

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