

Residents have visions of a prosperous Ellsworth



Ellsworth has been hit hard – from the flood of '93 and the closing of the only grocery store a decade later, to sad and tragic events in the community at the end of 2007 and the March 2008 closing of the Story City Pella Windows. It has been devastating to the residents, but they are moving forward with a “we can do it together” attitude.

“Relationships formed during Horizons study circles and skills gained during Leadership Plenty are serving this community well!” said Gina Spohnheimer, Ellsworth resident and member of the Horizons organizing committee. “We are being sensitive to the needs and feelings of the people in our community and new leaders are stepping up and directing important efforts.”

Horizons, directed by Iowa State University Extension with funding from Northwest Area Foundation, targets communities of less than 5000 residents with more than 10 percent living at poverty level. During 2007 and 2008, Iowa Horizons communities addressed economic issues, built community leadership and found ways to implement change through Horizons.

Today, the Ellsworth Horizons steering committee is joined by a committed troop of volunteers who are moving forward with priority actions such as meals on wheels and congregate meals, a second annual “dump your junk” city clean up, and an Ellsworth CIA – Citizens in Action.

These Ellsworth citizens are taking action. Last summer, a group of 17 youth and eight adults planted flowers in 20 main street planters. The project beautified the community and created a sense of pride for the youth and adults. This spring when there were no funds to repeat the effort, one youth took on the task as a 4-H horticulture project, raised funds, then paint and plant flowers in all the planters.

Recently, when the city council proposed shifting the charge for water breaks or leaks in household water systems to the residents, it was a group of citizens who made the council aware of the hardship this would place the large number of residents living in poverty. The council clarified their plans and no changes were made. Interested and enlightened citizens now attend every city council meeting to represent issues pertaining to poverty.

“We are finding that our best assets are our people,” said Spohnheimer. “We have lots to do, and we know we can do it because we have people who are excited and willing to work.”

Community pride was evident after last year’s “dump your junk day” when eight and a half tons of junk, 68 appliances and 29 tires were removed. Volunteers are organizing the second annual “dump your junk” day so that families can get rid of unwanted furniture and appliances, and continue the momentum of envisioning a more prosperous community.

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

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