

Bedford's spirit is awakened and resounds throughout town

There's a new spirit in Bedford. It flows in and out of the Bedford Area Development Center, carried throughout the town by newly energized leadership and residents with a strong sense of community.

"I moved here 15 years ago from a larger community in a different state. I liked Bedford, but it seemed to be a community that had lost its spirit," said Jenny Ernst. "In fact when Horizons started, there were people who were very negative about it, but they quickly realized what Horizons was all about – just your neighbors looking for a way to bring prosperity to the community."

Ernst credits Horizons with giving residents the experiences that developed personal skills for rebuilding Bedford. "Being a community leader means understanding that it takes everyone with diverse skills, backgrounds and ideas to come together to get to end results that will make a difference in the community," she said. "Through Horizons we have mobilized people in a way that is bringing the spirit back to Bedford."

The Economic Development group and Chamber of Commerce had discussed merging their organizations for several years; they were also at a disconnect with City officials. There was talk, but no action – and it was a concern residents raised during Horizons study circles. A group of motivated Horizons participants attended meetings of both organizations and city council to encourage forming one, strong and active organization that could move the town towards prosperity for all. The collective voice of citizens propelled the groups to merger into the Bedford Area Development Center, a clearinghouse of information and point of contact for economic development efforts.



"The Center serves the entire community," said Deann Hensley, Executive Director. "We are more accessible, more visible and always seem to be right in the middle of the community activity. Many barriers have been broken down, and we have become much more inclusive. Everyone is invited to be involved and have a voice, at whatever level they are comfortable." Bedford Area Development Center is housed in a 1928 restored mission-style Conoco gas station and serves as a welcome center.

Data regarding business start-ups and expansions, workforce development information, utility and infrastructure data and general quality of life information are available at the Center. It is also the point of contact for Horizons projects – like the "My Father's house" home rehabilitation project; placing a referendum for local utilities that would include high-speed internet before voters; organizing community service projects for Bedford youth; and sharing Bedford's new successes with distant alumni and a short video of the community's progress.

Many residents have found their "voice" and become involved in the community. The voice of the young is heard when preschoolers, 4-H clubs and track team members clear storm debris from the yards of elderly residents. The voice of a new, younger wave of leaders is heard through 12 candidates vying for 5 vacant city council seats. The spirit of Bedford is heard in the inclusive voice of many.

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