

Awareness of poverty related issues puts a hum in Humeston

Kristi Gwinn proudly refers to Humeston, population 514, as “my community” and says that Horizons was the tool Humeston needed to turn conversations into unified action. She participated in all phases of Humeston Horizons, including being trained and co-facilitating the leadership training component.

“Horizons brought people together that didn’t know one another; people who had ideas and visions of what could be. Many of the people at the leadership training were not born in Humeston – but still they were excited about making a difference in their new hometown,” said Gwinn.

Humeston Horizons started on the heels of the Revitalize Humeston project. The three-fold project started with generous gifts from citizens, Vision Iowa grants and matching funds; it included a new play ground, new street lights and sidewalks, resurfaced Main Street, and a new city library. Horizons’ regular meetings kept an army of resident volunteers involved the projects. “Horizons has been like the “glue” to these and other local projects,” said Nancy Gunzenhauser, Horizons steering committee chair.

Gunzenhauser draws a breath before summarizing other Horizons related activities in the community. There’s the new teen center, which just held its first social – an event that she calls very successful; renewed interest in beautifying and adding features to the Cinder Trail; and unified efforts to deal with housing issues, including the formation of a county housing trust fund and citizens working with the Humeston city council to remove unsightly and unsafe abandoned properties.

“Through Horizons, we learned that newcomers and long-time residents needed to know what Humeston had to offer, so we created a directory that included business and volunteer lists,” said Jeannie Teno, a Horizons steering committee member. “We have the directory at several locations in community and they are handed out during “welcome” visits with new residents.

Humeston is one of four Horizon communities involved in forming the Wayne County Housing Trust Fund. This is the first time the communities - Seymour, Humeston, Allerton and Corydon – have come together on a project of this magnitude. The common vision to improve older and rental homes, construct affordable housing, provide funds for down payments and make homes more livable brings them together.

Jeannie Teno represents Humeston on the county housing trust fund committee and believes this is one way to improve the living conditions and housing options for residents of Wayne County’s smaller communities. “The fund will help families with limited income improve their homes – make them more energy efficient, safer, or comfortable to live in,” she said. “Horizons is making our communities stronger, we know what others need, and we are sharing ideas as we work towards solutions.”

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Horizons is a program directed by Iowa State University Extension with funding from the Northwest Area Foundation. The program guides communities through the exploration and understanding of local poverty issues and establishment of goals that move the community towards prosperity for all. One-fifth of Humeston’s populations (21 percent) are living at poverty level.

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