

Economic Development Insight

IHTC

Joan Bethell

Some members of the Greene County HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) Oversight Committee, together with other Greene County delegates, attended the Indiana HomeTown Competitiveness (IHTC) Annual Meeting held in Columbus, Indiana, on Friday, July 31st.

The IHTC program is coordinated by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, United States Department of Agriculture /Rural Development, Ball State University, Purdue Center for Regional Development, Indiana Grantmakers Alliance, Indiana Rural Development Council and University of Southern Indiana. It is based on the approach that was originated and field-tested by three partner organizations: the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, the Nebraska Community Foundation and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship.

The program was developed as a mechanism to create a comprehensive rural community development framework that would be effective in sparsely populated rural environments. The idea behind importing this program to Indiana is, 'It worked for even very small communities that are somewhat isolated, so it should work for Indiana's rural areas.'

Greene County was selected as one of nine pilot communities to participate in the IHTC program for 2008 and is currently in Phase II of the program. Additional communities can compete each year to be included in the State's implementation of the program. The program encourages citizens to participate in leadership opportunities and support aggressive community and economic development plans by emphasizing four pillars: Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Philanthropy and Youth.

Each of these pillars interacts with and supports the others, with the overall goals of community development and economic prosperity. GCEDC staff members, Joan Bethell and Brianne Perigo, are actively engaged in Greene County's HTC initiative and, especially, the Entrepreneurship pillar.

The Entrepreneurship pillar involves a business development activity and, so, GCEDC assumed direct responsibility for it. Pillar activities encompass a wide range, including (but definitely not limited to) developing online resources and training opportunities, exploring methods to integrate local business with classroom activities, and seeking funding for small business start-up and growth.

Key representatives from other agencies, whose ongoing mission encompasses some aspect of one of the other pillars, assumed responsibility for their respective interest area: Leadership – Cam Trampke, Community Learning Center, and Richard Nichols, Citizen Academy Leadership Organization (CALO); Youth – Lindy Miller, Purdue Agriculture Extension/4-H, together with Julie Decker, Greene County Foundation; and Philanthropy – Brad Crites, Greene County Foundation.

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As a support mechanism for the pillars, the HTC Steering Committee meets regularly to review the progress of the pillar activities and to strategize on further development. Its mission is to engage Greene County leaders and citizens in developing leaders, supporting entrepreneurs and small business, building local endowments for sustaining local priorities, and showcasing Greene County as a community where people want to remain. Some of its key roles are to promote communication among many agencies and organizations working for Greene County betterment, and to facilitate actual collaboration and resource sharing to lighten the work load and share the financial burden among agencies and organizations.

As the Greene County HTC initiative has progressed, the steering committee recognized that other initiatives with county-wide involvement and a county-wide impact should be included within HTC. At this point, the development of the tourism industry has been identified as such and so a fifth pillar has been created, Tourism. Other initiatives may become HTC pillars as we progress.

Any member of the public who has an interest in one of the five pillars is welcome to join that pillar group and participate in the discussion and activities.

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