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COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT IDEAS



Residents of Haubstadt and Johnson Township Look Forward to a New Library (and other concerns)

by Janet Ayres Weitz, Community Improvement Specialist

The Indiana Cooperative Extension Service Community Improvement Program offers help to citizens of small Indiana towns in addressing the questions they have in regard to community concerns. This service is explained in EC-552 of the same name and is available at no charge to Indiana residents by ordering from: Publications Mailing Room, 301 South 2nd Street, Lafayette, IN 47905. Such was the procedure followed by Haubstadt in obtaining the library and other improvements discussed in this publication.

Facts About the Community

County: Gibson County
Location: 16 miles north of Evansville, 10 miles south of Princeton, off U.S. 41
Population: 1,389 in town; 2,882 total in township

Introduction

In May, 1979, a Community Improvement Steering Committee was formed to discuss community problems and the future of the Haubstadt/Johnson Township area. The Haubstadt Chamber of Commerce and Town Board initiated the program, but representatives from all local clubs and organizations participated on the committee. Mrs. Alice Chamberlain, Town Clerk, served as coordinator for the program.

The formation of such a committee provided an opportunity for all the various interests within the community—churches, schools, Chamber of Commerce, Town Board, youth groups, Extension Homemakers, Welcome Wagon, Park Board, and many others—to come together to look at the total community. This was one of the very few times such a broad-based group had sat down together to discuss the community. The representatives of each of the groups took back information from the Steering

Committee meetings to their respective organizations and in a like manner, brought back ideas and concerns from their organizations to the Steering Committee. In such a way, new channels of communication were opened. Not only was there more citizen input, but a more effective means of coordinating various community activities was created.

Citizen's Attitude Survey

In order to better understand how the residents felt about the community—problems they felt existed and changes they would like to see made—the Steering Committee decided to undertake a citizen's attitude survey. A survey committee developed the questionnaire with the assistance of the Cooperative Extension Service staff.

The survey was delivered and collected, by volunteers, to every household in Haubstadt and Johnson Township in late November, 1979. There was an 80% usable response rate in the town and a 59% usable response rate in the township. In February, 1980, the results were reported back to the community at a community-wide meeting. Written copies of the results were made available to everyone in the community who desired them. There was also extensive local newspaper coverage.

Action Taken

From the survey results, 59% of the respondents said they would use a public library if it were available in the community. Several representatives from the community met with a local attorney and the State Library Board to learn about the procedure for acquiring a local library. A local sorority, Kappa Kappa Iota, pursued the issue by carrying a petition to the registered voters in the community. Over 190 signatures were obtained.

The most feasible alternative appeared to be a

merger with a neighboring community, Fort Branch, and the establishment of a branch library in Haubstadt. The Library Board was agreeable with this arrangement. A resigning member of the board will be replaced by a representative from Haubstadt.

The facility for the branch library was made available in the Haubstadt Town Hall. Plans are already made for a children's reading room and a magazine room. Many volunteers have offered to assist in the operation of the library.

Residents of Haubstadt and Johnson Township may now obtain a free library card at Fort Branch and the library facility in Haubstadt will be ready for use after July, 1982.

Other Issues

In addition to the need for a library, many comments were made concerning the improvement of the Sommerfest which is held each year in June, celebrating the community's German heritage. One of the main criticisms was the fact that youth were permitted in the beer garden. The Sommerfest Committee took steps in 1981 to fence in the beer garden in order to have more control over the admittance of people. There was a very positive response by the community to this improvement.

A third area that was addressed by the community was in the area of recreation. The survey indicated that residents would like to have more facilities available at the park. The Park Board took steps to build two more shelter houses. The Chamber of Commerce is also involved in making improvements in the community building.

Summary

The community went through a process of identifying community leaders from various segments of the community to form a broad-based Steering Committee to discuss Haubstadt/Johnson Township and its future. A citizens' attitude survey was conducted in order to get the input of all the residents in the community. The results of the survey provided insight into what the citizens felt was most needed in the community and what they would support. The survey was used as a tool to assist the community in getting things done. They were able to identify high priority issues, identify resources, and develop a strategy to solve the problems that were felt by the residents. The Community Improvement Program provided a mechanism to get things done in the community, based upon broad-based citizen input and support.

The program in Haubstadt/Johnson Township is part of the Cooperative Extension Service Community Improvement Program area of the Agricultural Economics Department at Purdue University. Assistance was offered throughout the program by Claude Davis, Gibson County Extension Agent; Bill Beach, Area Extension Agent; Janet Ayres Weitz, Community Improvement Specialist and Kim Cook, Data Analyst, Purdue University. Additional information regarding the Community Improvement Program and the results of the Haubstadt/Johnson Township survey are available through: Janet Ayres Weitz, 612 Krannert Building, Agricultural Economics Department, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, 317/494-4232.

Historic Document