

Cultivating Begins in Fredonia

The Wheels are Turning as the Town Reinvents Itself

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BY LIZ HENDRICKS



Liz Hendricks

As we ring in 2013, we pause to reflect on the year past, but look forward to what 2013 will bring. Many make New Year's resolutions, while others take time to set goals and priorities, both personally and professionally. Why is making a road map for our future so important? Wouldn't it be easier to just wander aimlessly to wherever life takes us?

Public Square Communities believes it is important for us to set goals for ourselves, and also for our communities.

Recently, we had the opportunity to facilitate a vision retreat in Fredonia. Thirty-four residents spent eight hours on the opening Saturday of deer season to set new goals for their community. Taking the ideas extracted from their community conversation a month earlier, they discussed and prioritized all the ideas into a vision for the next 10 years, set four workable goals and nominated community members to implement each goal.

You are probably thinking . . . so? What is so unique about this? In your own community, when have representatives from all four sectors—government, education, business and human services—worked together to craft a future picture of their community? When have leaders of key institutions and citizens from every walk of life joined forces to fashion a shared work plan for years to come?

What would spur a community to do this type of community planning?

The answer is unique to each of the 16 communities we serve. For Fredonia, our newest, they wanted to regain the pride and recover the job losses of the last several decades. A few months back, a young, home-grown medical doctor visited with the director of the Kansas

Association for Community Foundations. These two then convened area citizens to explore how Public Square works. Apparently, they gathered some big-ticket thinkers: they decided to start the Public Square revitalization process AND to create a new community foundation! They nominated both a board for the foundation and a steering committee to guide the Public Square effort.

The steering committee, calling on their agricultural heritage, named themselves “Cultivate Fredonia,” put their hands to the plow and quickly raised the necessary funds to start the Public Square process. They did so in the shortest time of any community to date.

Our Public Square staff, wowed and wide-eyed at this energy and effectiveness, realized we were witnessing a first for us: these were ALL homegrown folks! Several had left to further their education, then returned; others never left. But all were rooted. Fredonia was indeed “home.”

Communities everywhere long for their young folks to “come back.” Meanwhile there are those who have stayed the course and know things must change if they are to reverse the decades-long patterns of decline. In a special and profound way, Cultivate Fredonia has captured the best of both. Those who persevered and those who returned with fresh energy found common ground in their vision for Fredonia. And believe me, the tractors are running and the cultivators are moving! **KCL**

LIZ HENDRICKS is president of Public Square Communities, Inc. and community facilitator.