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Fox Valley officials appreciate concerns raised in LIFE study

Post-Crescent, The (Appleton, WI) - June 11, 2006

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While there is much to appreciate about life in the Fox Cities, the 2006 **LIFE study** released Friday also raised areas of concern.

In the study, conducted by the United Way Fox Cities, Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the Fox Cities Economic Development Partnership, the quality of child care, transportation for the disabled and the impact of untreated mental illness.

Valley Transit General Manager Chuck Kamp said he heard loud and clear the need for more affordable transportation.

"You really need an automobile to get around, and our community should have more options than it does currently," he said.

Valley Transit, he said, is part of the solution. It recently added bicycle racks to its buses to promote a healthier lifestyle.

Kamp was among nearly 200 community leaders who heard the results of the study released during a breakfast at the Bridgewood Resort Hotel and Convention Center.

The random survey, last conducted in 2001, went to 2,000 homes (with a 17.5 percent return rate) in October. A total of 540 community leaders (53 percent return rate) also were surveyed and 170 residents participated in a series of 13 focus groups.

Appleton Police Chief Rick Myers said he was concerned with the increase in crime that is being driven by substance abuse.

"Crack cocaine has taken root here, and meth is going to be knocking on the door soon," he said.

Myers said access to mental health care is another concern highlighted by the study. He said health care providers often are resistance to police officers' efforts to seek help for residents.

"It's become more about what insurance provides for rather than what's good for the patient," he said. "As a result, there is a significant segment of the population that is not getting the treatment they need."

"As their situation deteriorates, they act up more and more, and that results in a higher demand for police services, for what should be treated as medical situation."

The final report was also compiled using a review of state statistics and other data and interviews with experts. The survey was done by Planning & Evaluation Associates Inc. of Green Bay.

This is the second such study to target quality-of-life trends in the Fox Cities around nine topics: community, home, learning, leisure, health, natural environment, safety, self-sufficiency and work.

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A similar study commissioned in 2000 generated a number of initiatives including the creation of the Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center, the Tri-Community Dental Clinic and New North, Northeastern Wisconsin's economic development project.

2001 results

Some of the initiatives that results from concerns raised in the 2001 **LIFE study** :

- * Health care providers, health departments and YMCA-Fox Cities began "Walk to Win" in 2002
- * Harmony Cafe opened in 2003 to offer arts, diversity and leadership programming
- * Tri-County Community Dental Clinic opened in 2003
- * Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center opened in 2004
- * Housing Partnership completed Peter Street Apartment project in 2004, providing housing for low-income families and transitional housing. Appleton Wire Works is being converted to low-to-moderate price housing and Harbor House Domestic Abuse Program has transitional housing.
- * Fox Cities Community Health Center transitioned from free clinic to health center in 2005, offering medical, dental and mental health services to uninsured or underinsured.
- * New North initiative, which promotes economic development in an 18-county area of northeastern Wisconsin, was announced this year
- * Venture Center, an effort of Fox Valley Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, opened this year to support entrepreneurs
- * Aging & Disability Resource Center is being developed to assist older adults in Outagamie, Calumet and Waupaca counties.

2006 strengths

- * Leisure opportunities in the arts, use of libraries, shopping, restaurants and outdoor recreation
- * High level of public safety
- * Quality higher education and K-12 institutions
- * Clean air, plentiful water, access to nature preserves
- * Track record of collaboration among area organizations
- * Community leaders proactive in confronting challenges
- * Health care recognized for array and quality of services
- * Area recognized as safe and family and child-friendly

2006 Fox Cities **LIFE study**

2006 concerns

- * Make leadership more inclusive of minorities, young people and women
- * Create higher paying jobs as jobs shift from manufacturing to services with lower earnings
- * Create transportation alternatives for people with lower incomes, disabilities
- * Increase access to treatment for mental illness and addiction
- * Increase access to health care as jobs with benefits decline
- * Develop more opportunities for "average" youth ages 16-21 in the arts, physical activities

- * Increase quality childcare for low- to middle-income families
- * Strengthen environmental preservation to deal with urban sprawl

LIFE snapshot

- * In April 2006, 80 percent of Outagamie, Winnebago and Calumet county board elections were uncontested
- * In 2004 the manufacturing sector in the Appleton area was a larger percentage of the work force (23 percent) than in Wisconsin (19 percent) or the United States (13 percent). This sector's share of the local economy has declined since 2001.
- * The area's minority population has increased between 2001 and 2004, with the number of Hispanics growing by 26 percent and African Americans by 21 percent.
- * In 2004-05, Appleton, Menasha and Neenah low-income fourth-graders scored much lower on both reading and math than their middle and high income peers.
- * The proportion of public school students in the Fox Cities who are eligible for free and reduced lunch rose from 11 percent to 18.7 percent between 2000-01 and 2004-05.

On the Web

www.foxcitieslifestudy.org

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