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Community Improvement Ideas


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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 Haub-
stadt. 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

Other Issues

In addition to the need for a library, many com-
ments 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 commu-
nity was in the area of recreation. The survey indi-
cated that residents would like to have more facili-
ties 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 iden-
tifying community leaders from various segments of
the community to form a broad-based Steering
Committee to discuss Haubstadt/Johnson Town-
ship and its future. A citizens' attitude survey was
conducted in order to get the input of all the resi-
dents 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 Improv-
ment 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 Com-
munity Improvement Program area of the Agricul-
tural Economics Department at Purdue University.
Assistance was offered throughout the program by
Claude Davie, Gibson County Extension Agent; Bill
Beach, Area Extension Agent; Janet Ayres Weitz,
Community Improvement Specialist and Kim Cook,
Data Analyst, Purdue University. Additional infor-
mation regarding the Community Improvement
Program and the results of the Haubstadt/Johnson
Township survey are available through: Janet Ayres
Weitz, 612 Krannert Building, Agricultural Eco-
nomics Department, Purdue University, West Lafayette,
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