

Looking to the future

Towns collaborate during La Porte County Rural Summit

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WANATAH — Community members from La Porte County were in the process of planning for the future of the county at the fifth annual Rural Summit on Saturday morning.

Jim Jessup from Leadership La Porte County had challenges for the summit volunteers to work on during the morning, such as meeting a new friend and neighbor from another community, learn something new, get new information and take at least one good idea back to their community to proactively work on.



Jim Jessup leads discussions during the La Porte County Rural Summit Saturday morning at the Wanatah American Legion. Photo by Bob Wellinski

The La Porte County Rural Summit 5, hosted at the Wanatah American Legion Hall, is a collaboration of the rural regions in La Porte County. Summit participants look to discuss current issues within their community and create proposals for solutions to the issues.

Representatives gathered from almost everywhere in La Porte County, except Michigan City and La Porte, including: La Crosse, Wanatah, Hanna, Kingsford Heights, Westville, Kingsbury, Union Mills, Stillwell, Fish Lake, Mill Creek, Rolling Prairie, Coolspring Township, Springfield Township, Door Village/Scipio Township and Hudson Lake.

"We have had a lot of students here. That is one thing we stress is youth," said Maggi Spartz, president of the Unity Foundation of La Porte County. "It's for them."

A speaker from Baroda, Mich. came to speak about how their industry left their small town and how the community had to find an alternative way to keep the town surviving. They placed emphasis on their wine making and gave the town and county a new label to represent themselves and keep their economic growth maintainable after the businesses left.

"Do we have these things?" said Jessup about having resources to fund a project to help a community. "You do have these things. We need to access them. "

Jessup said he was hoping for 100 people to attend and was a little disappointed with the turn out at the summit meeting. He said that some of the people may have been working on their farms that morning.

Each town received a grant application to write out a proposal that could award the town up to \$500 for the first stage of funding the project.

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) also presented at the summit and discussed the 2040 plan to make the region vibrant and thriving between now and 30 years from now.

The summit may be an annual meeting but the grant money and technical support is ongoing by the organizations to continue to build the communities.

"It's grassroots," said Carrie Kibben from New Durham, Westville. "It is the people that come out."

The sponsoring partners that fund the program are the Purdue Extension, Leadership La Porte County, La Porte County Economic Development Alliance, Unity Foundation, United States Department of Agriculture and An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution.

"We will continue the same concept of the annual seminar but it may not be in this format," said Jessup.

Jessup encourages the rural community of La Porte County to use their resources and contact organizations to implement ideas to help their communities.