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Brain drain, a county divided

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On Tuesday, Sept. 27, 4 Blackford County, a new group made up of community members dedicated to bettering the area, met to review the trends, assets, challenges and opportunities discussed at the previous meeting and to develop goal areas.

Jim Dittoe, a representative from Winning Communities, a company whose aim is centered on aiding communities to rectify any problems facing them, opened the meeting by saying that the turnout for the previous meeting was something to be proud of, and then proceeded to distribute various handouts, the first of which addressed the trends that are being seen in various counties in the country.

The first handout goes on to list certain developmental trends, including technological growth, educational improvement, as well as a steadily increasing depopulation. This specific problem of our county steadily losing residents is sometime referred to as "Brain Drain," where community members seek educational and income-based growth outside of Blackford County due to the lack of specific materials or resources within the county. 4 Blackford County hopes to address these matters in a number of ways, including the improvement of our educational foundation, allowing students to rise higher, and even a possible addition of a Fine Arts Center or auditorium. At this point all of the things discussed are theoretical, and nothing has been set in stone.

After the last meeting held, Mr. Dittoe and 4 Blackford County

broke down the discussion's focal points into six separate areas, giving each their own table for the meeting attendees to choose from. The six sections were as follows: County-wide Communications, Economic Development, Image/Beautification, Life Long Learning, Recreation and Leisure, and Social Service Issues. In the handout listing the challenges facing Blackford County, the six groups were used as classification for how these obstacles may be dealt with. Again the problem of our youth seeing no reason to stay was addressed, along with the lack of culture and social activities.

When the handouts had all been discussed it was time for discussing ways to use the six groups to improve Blackford County as a whole. Mr. Dittoe went from table to table and asked the groups to present their conclusions. Mrs. Cheryl Williams, the Chamber President of Montpelier, explained to the room that Blackford County is a divided community, where the two cities of Hartford City and Montpelier have little or no communication, and are fraught with apathy and hopelessness. This seemed to be the most stirring of the conclusions, as the room was instantly filled with an audible reaction, murmurs spreading around the six tables. Perhaps it was because Mrs. Williams' statement was quite pointed, or rather it was what everyone was thinking and not saying.

It was then discussed, at the County-wide Communication table, that there existed a "historical and generational," competitive spirit between Montpelier and Hartford City that was unhealthy. One of the

suggestions to heal this was the loss of competing between the schools in sporting events, as it may contribute to the cumulative mindset that one of the two cities has to be the loser.

Another solution to better the communication between the two cities was the increased coverage of Montpelier activities and happenings in the News Times, as well as moving away from reporting on things happening in Randolph and Delaware County. Cheryl Williams also expressed her unhappiness with the turnout of Montpelier citizens at the meeting, saying it only proved that the problem of the county divide is still existent.

When asked about the low number of representatives from Montpelier Mr. Dittoe said, "These two cities are like a family, and families don't always get along," going on to explain that uniting the two cities isn't an unattainable goal. He pointed out another citizen of Montpelier present at the meeting, City Councilman Dave Wall. It must be noted that the official number of Montpelier citizens present at the Tuesday meeting was unavailable, and that at previous meetings the Mayor attended, as well as various Montpelier inhabitants.

4 Blackford County meetings are open for any person or persons who call Blackford County home. Their next meeting has been rescheduled, and its yet to be determined date will be published in the News Times in the future.