



New Group to Boost Blackford County

By RIC ROUTLEDGE

HARTFORD CITY - Several city and county leaders have formed a new group - *4Blackford County* - to determine what challenges face the area and what can be done about them.

The mission of *4Blackford County*, according to co-chairman Ted Leas, is to improve the quality of life in Blackford County, to increase the pride of current residents and to entice new people and businesses to live and work here.

"It will probably come back to economic development and job creation," Leas said. "But it could certainly be issues like quality of life."

Leas said the group has scheduled its first meeting for 7 p.m. Thursday at Lake Placid, and the public is invited.

Call (765) 348-1905 to confirm your attendance.

"We really are looking to get as broad-based a group as we can and as much information as we can from the citizens," he said.

His fellow co-chairman Mark Townsend agreed.

"The first meeting is to explain what we are trying to do," he said, "and then get their (the public's) visions and ideas for challenges and opportunities in the county.

"We encourage everyone to attend. It's not about what Ted and I think; it's all about what the residents of the county think."

The concept for forming the group was born, Leas said, at a bankers meeting he attended in Indianapolis last winter.

"I sit on a board Community Bankers of Indiana," he said, "and this was discussed. Our organization endorsed the concept of communities looking at strategic planning. It's a forward looking process, the coordination of efforts county-wide, in which all aspects of the community are involved."

The group raised \$7,000 and then applied for and received a \$35,000 5-to-1 matching grant from the Indiana Association of United Ways.

The funds allowed them to hire an outside facilitator, Jim Dittoe of Winning Communities, Inc., who will lead them through the strategic planning process over a period of months.

"Once we gather info from the county - input from all members of the community - we will begin to identify top priorities like economic development, job creation, parks and recreation, whatever the county citizens feel like are the most critical issues," Leas said. "We'll distill that

4 Blackford County

The steering committee of the 4 Blackford County group includes:

Bob O'Rourke, Blackford County commissioner.
Cathy Weschke, Blackford County Council, Hartford City Chamber of Commerce.
Cheryl Williams, Montpelier Chamber of Commerce.
Ben Oswalt, Blackford County Community Foundation.
Dave Snyder, industry.
Dave Wall, Montpelier City Council.
Dennis Whitesell, Mayor of Hartford City.
Gerald Chabot, Supt. of Blackford County Schools.
John Adams, Hartford City Council, Blackford Federation of Teachers.
Mark Townsend, Blackford County United Way.
Mindy Kenworthy, Blackford County Economic Development Corp.
Ted Leas, Pacesetter Bank.

down and create a plan to work on the top five issues that the citizens feel like are most critical.

"We would then put together a task force or committees to look at each of those issues," he said.

Leas said he would expect to have a written plan by the end of the year, "and hopefully to have started work on some of those issues."

Future meetings have been scheduled for 7 p.m. Sept. 27; 8 a.m.-noon on Oct. 15, and 7 p.m. Nov. 10.

Contact Jay and Blackford county reporter Ric Routledge at (765) 728-5241.