

# St. Lawrence EMC

## Tri-county organizations begin work to create local 'Healthy Communities'

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BY STACEY ROY

EMC News - Every resident must be involved in order to create truly healthy communities,

and the Healthy Communities Partnership

of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville has recently begun this recruitment process beginning with service organizations.

About 90 individuals representing organizations from across the tri-county area met at Camp Merrywood near Perth Oct. 21 to review the Community Profile findings and begin the discussion around why certain health concerns are present in this rural region and what can be done to change it.

"How can we turn that curve" to healthier living, asks Lois Dewey, Healthy Communities Partnership Coordinator.

This new group, funded by the Ministry of Health and Promotion, will focus on six priority areas: physical activity, sports and recreation, injury prevention, healthy eating, tobacco use/exposure, substance and alcohol misuse, and mental health.

The 42-page Community Profile is derived from provincial and federal statistics and shows that almost 61 per cent of residents report not meeting their five servings of fruit and vegetables daily intake. A large number of individuals (about 41 per cent) report low activity rates while falls is listed as the leading cause of emergency room visits for the youngest and elderly in our communities.

Participants demonstrated a strong local need to combat these statistics by implementing activity centres.

"Of course there's going to be a YMCA," said Sandra Devaney of the Brockville YMCA during her group's visioning presentation.

The desire to create communities where vehicles aren't required to get around was also highlighted. Trading cars for bicycles would increase the safety on the streets which in turn would entice children to come out and play outdoors again.

"We'd like to see them return to the streets," said Tom Baumgartnes, of the Active Seniors Koalition.

The group also voiced concern that technology is taking away the ability for the younger generation to learn social interaction skills. In addition to encouraging residents to get out and be active, the visioning exercise also touched on a vision for work. The hope for more opportunities to work at home was expressed as was the desire to see self-sustaining communities. This can be achieved through the introduction of new manufacturing opportunities and by boosting agriculture.

The group felt rising energy prices would force all consumers and businesses to think local and therefore begin building plants where they are selling product. A strong focus on boosting agriculture by buying local produce at farmers' markets, encouraging the development of community gardens

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Stacey Roy, St. Lawrence EMC  
Tom Baumgartnes stands in front of service organization representatives at Camp Merrywood Oct. 21 to present his group's ideas on what a healthy community looks like.

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Stacey Roy, St. Lawrence EMC  
Pat Reid points to the Burritts Rapids community hall on the Rideau Valley quilt Oct. 21 while Helen Stearns (right) looks on. The two ladies have offered to bring back the ideas from the Healthy Communities Partnership forum at Camp Merrywood to the Rideau Valley Boots and Baskets rug hooking group to suggest creating a rug like that above for the partnership.

was expressed.

In terms of lifestyle, accessibility is key as is encouraging a more condensed form of living such as downtown living opportunities. This would be very attractive for local seniors and the younger generation, whom the collective felt should be cherished and given a stronger voice.

"They have so much to offer," Baumgartnes said of seniors.

Mental health issues, it was felt, needs to be included in the overall view of a healthy person and as an issue that everyone must deal with.

#### NEXT STEPS

Last week's brain storming session is the first step in the planning stage. A steering committee will be established in the near future followed by the launch of a Healthy Communities website.

"We should have it soon," Dewey said.

Work will continue throughout this month and next to flesh out the current needs in Lanark, Leeds and Grenville. This will be presented to the community for their feed back in November.

"This can't work without the community buying in," Dewey said.

The goal of the partnership is to create a complete change of mindset for residents where physical activity and protecting our bodies from damage is considered common.

"It's going to take everybody in the community to contribute to that," Dewey said.

In the New Year the committee will be looking to gather all the input they've received and begin creating an action list, which will again be going out to the community for feedback. A networking map will also be created and released to the public in March.

A big part of this work will be connecting organizations with each other and finding ways for them to work together. It was noted that finding funding for rural projects is difficult, so Dewey hopes the Healthy Community Partnership will provide a unique forum for organizations to collaborate.

"We need to figure out how can we work together and put an application (for funding) together. That would be a wonderful aspect for this partnership," Dewey said.

Dewey sees March 2011 as the jumping off point for where real change will be taking place in the tri-county area.

"Then we get going on the work," Dewey said.

#### RUG

The synergy and passion present at Camp Merrywood Oct. 21 inspired at least two women in the crowd. Pat Reid of Kemptville and Helen Steerns of Smiths Falls are members of the Rideau Valley Boots and Baskets rug hooking

circle. They have offered to take some of the ideas from the visioning session last week to their group. "... and see how

our group feels about doing a rendering for you," Reid said.

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