

What if we could? ... Together We Can!

Dear Friends:

The future can be really scary, but it doesn't have to be ... if we prepare for it. Nearly ten years ago the Elmwood Community Foundation (ECF) began planning -- not for Williamsfield or Yates City -- just Elmwood. That was an oversight. Five years later, our vision grew from Elmwood to the nine towns represented by this proposal. If Elmwood were to grow and prosper, all nine towns needed to grow and prosper, too. We stopped looking at each other as competition and aimed to cooperate and help each other.

ECF had to select a project that would benefit the region, providing services for all ages. The project had to appeal to young people wanting to build a home in the woods south of Kickapoo, for example, or to seniors wanting to retire at Oak Run. The thrust was on economic development for the entire area.

We needed to test the idea, so we researched by first visiting more than a dozen communities in four states, and then commissioning a survey to determine if residents in nine small communities would use and support a modern state-of-the-art fitness center. The results were overwhelmingly positive.

Less than six months ago, our idea evolved from "fitness" to "wellness" when Congressman Darin LaHood and Gerry Shaheen encouraged us to visit such a center in Hopedale, serving six or seven small towns south of Morton. Their population base is less than the number living in the 20 miles radius of Elmwood, and they are financially successful without using tax dollars. When we discussed our concept with several area hospitals, they were interested in providing us with services because Elmwood was centrally located and had the potential for attracting more than 25,000 people from nine towns.

Finally, if this wellness center is to serve more than Elmwood, all the communities must have a say in its governance, hiring employees, planning programs, etc. Although the ECF expects to be associated with the center after it is built, we intend to "spin off" the management to a Rural Healthcare Commission representing all the communities in the operations, and turning over the day-to-day activities to an organization like a YMCA.

Our research has shown that people will use and support this facility -- enhancing the lives of current residents and attracting newcomers to our region.

Now we need your help. Visualize what your support can do for you, your family, and posterity. Your gift will insure that the quality of life available in small-town living will survive into the future, not only in your community but also in eight others. What if we could? Together we can!

Sincerely,

The Elmwood Community Foundation