

# *Gaston Together: Communities of Excellence*

## **2008 Highlights & Primary Initiatives**

### **Gaston Community Healthcare Commission (GCHC):**

- ◆ *Mission: Collaboration of human service agencies and volunteers who identify healthcare gaps in our county and determine resources to fill those gaps.*
- ◆ Six work groups operate to address local healthcare issues:
  - ◆ *Adolescent Sexual Health:* addressing risky teen behavior, especially teen pregnancy issue in Gaston County. Currently: Developed Parent Resource Guide for diverse range of services in Gaston County; Developing Parent/Teacher workshop/ community forum featuring nationally known speaker Dr. David Walsh, author of “Why do they act the way they do” on teen brain development.; Developed “Teen Talk,” vignettes for Cable Government Channel, featuring local professionals offering parenting tips on a range of issues involving risky behavior (bullying, sex, substance abuse, etc.)
  - ◆ *Community Wellness Education:* focusing on prescription drug abuse. Currently: arranged for two Continuing Medical Education events at Gaston Memorial Hospital on prescription drug abuse, doctor shopping for prescriptions, etc.: 1) Bob Martin, Director of Mercy Horizon and 2) Dr. Fern Paul-Abiles, Pharmacist
  - ◆ *Safe Kids Gaston County:* Presented “2008 Most Improved” NC Chapter . Currently: Worked with Gaston County Schools on Safety Tips for student drop-off areas at schools, Held Booster Seat Event at Gaston Girls and Boys Club, Conducted Car Seat Education Clinic for Dept. of Social Service staff; Working with Birth Place staff at Gaston Memorial Hospital on infant car seat program
  - ◆ *Parish Nursing:* Promotes healthy mind, body and soul through such programs as health education series, preventive healthcare practices, blood drives, blood pressure screenings, and physical activity programs such as the “Walk to Jerusalem” (75 participants in 2008 program), Program expansion through: 1) Belmont Program: Added Resources Coordinator to expand educational programs, 2) Gastonia Program: First United Methodist reorganized program with new church sponsor, First Presbyterian, hired Parish Nurse and developed new structure for congregational support; 3) Gaston County Volunteer Program: Hired Coordinator to develop county program to support church health educator/promoters in those churches that want healthcare programs but cannot support a registered nurse on staff
  - ◆ *Workplace Wellness:* Represents county’s largest employers, held group sessions on physical activity and nutrition programs appropriate for the workplace setting, discussed successful diabetes management and smoking cessation programs for the workplace, presented session at Gaston Regional Chamber Health Summit in September
  - ◆ *Cancer Outreach:* prioritized data from their Fall 2007 Community Forum on cancer issues to identify gaps in services., established a new Project Group with representatives from areas of the community that could exert in a positive way impact

on priority issues, number one priority is to establish a financial navigator for Gaston County

- ◆ *Health at Home*: a community program developed by the GCHC in 2004 targeted to the uninsured and underinsured to promote preventive healthcare and reduce unnecessary visits to the ER. Partnering with Gaston Memorial Hospital, Gaston Family Health Services and Community Health Partners in HealthNet Gaston program, a case management/insurance program for the county's uninsured population.

### **Gaston Clergy & Citizens' Coalition (GC3):**

- ◆ Co-Chairs, Dr. Ben Hinton, Tabernacle Baptist, and Rev. Jim DuMond, Redeemer Lutheran
- ◆ Mission: *To embrace opportunities by building bridges of Faith, Family, Education and Empowerment*, and Vision: *Responding to God's Call, We Partner with Each Other to build Stronger Communities in Gaston County.*
- ◆ Partnering with Gastonia Faith Network on two initiatives: The Externally Focused Church – building community collaborations to enhance community impact; and The ABC's of Sex Education – focused on the teen pregnancy issue in Gaston County
- ◆ Currently soliciting nominations for 2009 Gaston County Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Award, a community leadership award developed by the GC3. Traditionally presented at the MLK Plaza (developed and funded through Gaston Together/GC3 efforts), this event recognizes the heritage of efforts in Gaston County to build bridges of unity within our community. Building racial/ethnic harmony is a long process yet one that the GC3 continues to address.
- ◆ Continue the “Breakfast of Champions” mentoring program at York Chester Middle School (an at-risk school) with Communities in Schools program. Partners pastors with at-risk students along with a special message from retired professional athletes such as former NBA star, Eric “Sleepy” Floyd and former NFL Panthers player, Tim Biakabutuka, for inspiration and quality time.

### **Gaston 2012:**

- ◆ *Implementation phase of Gaston County's ten-year plan for economic development and quality of life enhancements*
- ◆ Six Action Teams work to address the Economic Development Strategy
  - ◆ *Entrepreneurial Development*: held second Student Contest for Business Ideas, awarded \$5,000 in scholarships; developed Permit Planner for new business entrepreneurs; held first of its kind in Gaston County “Investor Ready Entrepreneur” Workshop sponsored by NC Small Business Development & Technology Center..
  - ◆ *Education/Workforce Development*:: launched Diploma Plus, a comprehensive community collaborative designed to create a nationally certified skilled workforce for Gaston County; Community Partners include Gaston College, Gaston Regional Chamber, Gaston County Schools, Employment Security Commission, Economic Development Commission and Workforce Development Board, a program unique in NC and possible the entire country

- ◆ *Marketing and Communications:* developing a county-wide branding campaign which will incorporate all municipalities; unique county marketing concept for Charlotte Metro region.
- ◆ *Transportation/Infrastructure:* researched potential sources for local option funding to provide funds for local road improvements.
- ◆ *Greenways:* partnered with Carolina Thread Trail (15-county greenway network) to pilot the mapping process for the Thread Trail in Gaston County.
- ◆ *Lifestyles/Entertainment:* held community forum in Sept. 2008 to brainstorm focus points for this new Action Team that will address/enhance lifestyle amenities for Gaston County

### **Leadership Training:**

- ◆ *Leadership skills development training for community participants to assist in leading positive change throughout our community*
- ◆ Held two Level I facilitation trainings in 2008 with 42 participants
- ◆ Scheduled two-day Level II facilitation training session for Jan. 2009: decision making and consensus building
- ◆ Our trained facilitators also serve as facilitators for other community organizations and civic groups.

### **Pride in Gaston Traveling Tour and the Proudest Kid in Gaston County Essay Contest:**

- ◆ *Significant effort to build Community Pride in our school children that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Children who are proud of Gaston County as their home, grow into adults who choose to live, work and raise their own families in Gaston County.*
- ◆ Builds on the study of the ‘community’ taught in the third grade.
- ◆ 2008 Tour: Gaston County Courthouse where students visit the community room – the seat of local government, Schiele Museum Planetarium where they see the program “Earth, Sun and Moon,” and Holy Angels, where students see the Power Point presentation, “Hands Around our School” and visit the Snoezelen Room - a multisensory area with light, sound and colorful visions.
- ◆ All students receive an activity book created by Gaston Together depicting twelve sites of interest in Gaston County.
- ◆ After day-long Traveling Tour field trip, students write an essay for the “Proudest Kid in Gaston County” Essay Contest describing why they are proud to live in Gaston County.
- ◆ County-wide winner is selected from the school winners and all are recognized at the Community Leadership Awards Dinner.
- ◆ Essay winner receives money towards a trip to Raleigh to meet with Senator David Hoyle and the Lt. Governor, and is introduced on the Senate Floor as the “Proudest Kid in Gaston County.” To date, over 23,500 students in both public and private schools in Gaston County have participated in these two programs since their beginning in 2000.

### **Community Leadership Awards (CLA):**

- ◆ *Established to recognize outstanding leadership by an organization whose work has made a significant impact on the betterment of our community and improved the quality of life for citizens throughout.*

- ◆ Sets an example of community pride for Gaston County by recognizing those principles such as teamwork, diversity, and community improvement.
- ◆ 2008 Award presented to Gaston Family Health Services, Gaston County's healthcare model for the underserved in our community
- ◆ Winner receives the "Circle of Caring," a sculpture commissioned by Gaston Together to honor the CLA winner.
- ◆ The CLA has become one of our community's most unique and inspiring means of recognition – one that resounds with community pride.