



Vision 20/20 summit in October

By **JEANNE RICHARDSON**
Staff Writer

The Vision 20/20 project is a visioning process that enables citizens to give input on what they think are the most important needs of Cowley County and what they would like to see for the county by the year 2020.

The project is sponsored by Cowley First and made up of volunteers.

For the past two years, through surveys and small group meetings with county residents, the group has gathered data. All of which has been documented into a 95-page strategic plan, with 11 vision statements and 37 strategy statements under the five general categories of people, economy, place, health and culture.

What happens next is up to the Vision 20/20 group." Success will not be easy," said Sid Regnier, unofficial group chair.

"Implementation will take commitment and years of dedication to improve our community," he added.

The group's next step will be to read and review the document and put together some implementation guidelines, Regnier said.

Many guidelines have already been set, at least for the initial phase of the strategies.

At a Vision 20/20 Summit, scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. Oct. 11, at Baden Square, focus team leaders will discuss their strategies.

Survey results

In a random survey sent to county residents, the number one concern was the need to address the county's drug abuse problem.

The need for support of home-grown business and industry was a close second.

A shortage of good jobs, retaining youth in the county and quality public education ranked third through fifth.

The strategies developed address the needs and how to implement changes.

Also included are ways to measure progress.

All of the reports and survey results can be seen at: www.cowleykansas.com.

Early childhood day care

One of the strategies in the people category is to increase available early childhood programs,

specifically to provide 24-hour day care services for people who work different shifts.

Jodi Smith of the City/Cowley County Health Department has stepped up as the responsible party for the early childhood programs and adequate day care services.

" We have a need for a center in Arkansas City that cares for children from infant to school age," said Smith. " It's hard to find day care that will care for a baby."

Sunshine Day Care in Winfield is the only facility in the county that cares for infants. Those with babies must depend on family members or home daycare, said Smith.

There is also a need for second-and third-shift day care, she said. Many who work those shifts hate to pay someone to watch their child when the child is going to be sleeping anyway, she said.

The strategy to address this problem is still in the planning stages.

Smith said she will be talking to businesses in Cowley County who have second and third shifts to see what kind of need there is. "To get people to stay with their jobs," said Smith, " you have to serve all of their needs."

Serving employees' and employers' needs will also help retain businesses in the county, another Vision 20/20 people objective.

Mechatronics

Yet another people strategy is the new Mechatronics program at Cowley College and the county's support of it. Mechatronics was designed to meet the demands for more specialized technicians. It teaches the design, building and maintaining of equipment that combines electronics, mechanics, pneumatics, hydraulics and computer controls, according to the Cowley College Web site. Mechatronics is a two-year program, therefore producing its first graduates in May 2009.

" The program began on Aug. 17 and is proceeding very well," said Sandy Randel, Cowley coordinator for Career and Technical Education.

The class is filled to capacity with 17 students. The Career and Technical Education Department is also working toward offering a variety of classes at night for business and industry.

" We continue to work towards fulfilling our mission of making mechatronics a reality," said Randel." We have many varying types of industries interested in this particular program. We are still working towards providing a plastics, electrical, maintenance and foods option as additions after the base program is completed."

Quality of life

Another Vision 20/20 strategy is retaining and bringing new businesses to Cowley County and improving the quality of life for those working here. The mechatronics program will provide higher-skill, higher-wage jobs within our service area and allow business and industry the opportunity to expand and be more profitable with a higher level workforce.

" The individuals at Winfield Economic Development have really helped," Randel said." We have been working with Rodger Steffen. They have been instrumental in continuing to partner with the college to receive the end goal of a quality, high skill, high wage and high demand program that will promote current and future business ventures in Cowley County. They will also begin to promote an image of Cowley County and Winfield as being a hub for excellence in innovative technologies."

Clean Indoor Air Ordinance

In the health category, the largest of the five categories, one of the strategies is to hold town meetings to educate the public about a Clean Indoor Air (CIA) Ordinance.

It would be an ordinance adopted by the city council in each town or township to regulate smoking in public places.

However, the CIA committee, consisting of about 12 people, wants to educate the community about the Clean Indoor Air ordinance before going in front of a City Commission.

The committee has had a meeting about their strategy in Arkansas City, and a couple in Winfield.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) model ordinance is similar to those done by other cities such as Garden City, Pratt, Lawrence and Salina.

" We are starting an education campaign," said Jennifer Love, who is taking the lead on this strategy. " We want to let the community know what the ordinance is about and get some feedback from them before going to the City Commission. Our goal is to take it to the Commission around the first of 2008."

Each one is different in what specifics they enact. Some cities will want to put the ordinance to a vote among the citizens. Other strategies in the health category include reducing drug and alcohol abuse, expanding recreation for youth, promoting physical and mental health through expansion of public facilities, establishing low-cost medical clinics, reducing child abuse and protecting the quality of our air and water.

The Vision 20/20 Taskforce always welcomes input and volunteer help from anyone around the county.

If you are interested in being a part of the visioning process, call Debra Teufel at (620) 221-9951 or (620) 442-3094.