

Tremont Earns Certified Winning Community Recognition

October, 2007

Dear CBAI Member:

We all appreciate the fact that community and economic development are essential for enhancing quality of life in our communities and the future of our institutions. Volunteerism, cooperation, and an efficient implementation of a long-term strategic plan are necessary components.

For these reasons, we want to share with you my wonderful experiences with a CBAI-endorsed program called the **Certified Winning Communities™** program. It has helped our village of Tremont unite and work together to create a vision and action plan. Because of this plan, we have made tremendous progress toward completing several community goals and projects. I am sharing our community's story to show how the program might benefit your city, town or county, and you can learn how to get involved as well.

In December of last year, our two village banks invited Jim Dittoe of Winning Communities to speak to the Tremont Commerce Association. After hearing the details about the Certified Winning Communities program, our village government and other entities recognized the potential and the need. We started fundraising, viewing this as an investment, so we could begin the process right away.

Communities often cite lack of funding as an excuse for not starting a program such as this one. However, if it is a worthwhile project, fundraising should not be a problem. If a town of 2,500 people like ours can do it, other communities can do it too. If each organization contributes \$1,000 here or there, that should cover any costs associated with the program.

In our minds, the biggest achievement of this entire process was being able to facilitate a true inter-governmental effort among our village, the school, library district, fire department and other groups. With Winning Communities as our outside facilitator, we had none of the baggage or pre-conceived notions of an "inside personality," so we were able to work together throughout the process. Jim's experience in community planning and development has also helped keep us on track and prevented us from getting bogged down with the details.

With Winning Communities' help, we established a steering committee of 15-20 leaders from every area of the community. We held four community meetings and had more than 200 people in attendance. As of this spring, we have a completed vision and action plan with six focus areas and 36 total projects within the focus areas. Some of our projects include extending an area of our park in the middle of town; increasing residential housing; writing an economic development plan; studying the need for a stoplight at our town's main intersection; and developing a consolidated village website. We are in the process of filing to become a formal nonprofit entity to ensure that our efforts continue.

Before we began the Winning Communities process, the village of Tremont was a vibrant volunteer community. We were already in the midst of projects such as a new community swimming pool, a \$9.5 million high school renovation and a \$3.5 million church renovation. Many people thought, "Why do we need this process?" "What's wrong with this town?" However, we felt that if we were not moving forward, we were moving backward. We want to continue to move forward and compete for new residents and future growth. Once we got the ball rolling, the growth and community commitment was contagious.

If your city, town or county needs a program like the Certified Winning Communities program, we challenge you to take the first step. Talk to Jim Dittoe of Winning Communities at (317) 402-0524 or visit www.winningcommunities.com to learn how to start this program in your community. We would also be happy to describe our experiences firsthand to anyone who might be considering the Winning Communities program. For Tremont, the time and investment has been well worth it.

Sincerely,



Jim Shafer, President
First National Bank in Tremont
CBAI Board Member and Past Chairman
(309) 925-2121
jshafer@tremontbank.com



Rick Jameson, President
Tremont Savings Bank
CBAI Board Member
(309) 925-2511
rjameson@tremontsavings.com