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Trails, river front, wellness highlight focus group talk

Suggestions include riverside restaurants and markets By MICHAEL NEARY, Messenger staff writer

The assignment was to imagine a rejuvenated recreational scene and a renovated health care system. For Nancy Hamilton, assistant administrator at the Tompkins Memorial Health Center, the two tasks collapsed into one.

Hamilton talked with others involved in health care at the Health Care Organizations Focus Group — the 19th session, organizers said, conducted over the past eight days by The Slater Group. The firm was hired by the Fort Dodge City Council to help develop a strategic plan for the city.

As she talked in a small group session, Hamilton said health care was too often portrayed as a fix-it solution to an already existing illness. After the meeting she said she'd like to see health care move from a philosophy of "you get sick and get fixed" to one of preserving wellness.

Other groups, imagining their own long-range health care hopes, described a sky walk connecting Friendship Haven to the hospital and a research center.

As groups discussed recreation, they talked frequently about trail ways and the river front, describing markets and restaurants dotting the river banks.

The session followed a format similar to earlier meetings, with the organizers — Roger Slater and Karna Lowenstein — sprinkling references to health into the presentation.

About 20 people — including nurses, physicians and people working in the business segments of health care — attended the session.

Early in the meeting, Slater explained his own interest in health care, mentioning that family members worked in ultrasound technology and nursing. He also said he served four years on a hospital board.

Slater noted, too, a health concern that fell closer to home: his living situation in 20 years.

"Are my sheets in my assisted living (unit) going to be clean?" he asked.

That's a question, he reminded the group, that would largely be answered by today's 16- to 20-year-olds.

Slater framed health care for older people in economic terms, as well.

"A lot of cities are focusing on the next great population — the retirement boom," he said.

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Contact Michael Neary at (515) 573-2171 or mneary@messengernews.net.