

## **Foundation lending helping hand**

By KALEY CONNER

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Until two years ago, Hays was the largest Kansas town lacking a community foundation.

That changed when the Heartland Community Foundation was established in fall 2007. It's been an eventful two years, and the organization's directors are continuing efforts to meet local needs, said Bob Lowen, who is serving as the group's first executive director.

"We're just trying to make the community better," Lowen said. "Not only Hays, but the surrounding areas."

It's hoped a sizable grant from the Kansas Health Foundation will jump-start their efforts. The foundation's 12-person board of directors is applying for more than \$500,000 to fund rural health care services as part of the Giving Resources to Our World (GROW) Healthy Kansas Initiative. The board expects to hear back by year's end.

If awarded, these monies will be used for a variety of programs geared toward health improvement and disease prevention. Providing glasses and dental care for children, or contributing funds to Hays' First Care Clinic -- which provides care to uninsured patients -- are a few possibilities, said Foundation Chairman Bob Muirhead.

A total of \$30 million will be distributed by the Kansas Health Foundation to community foundations across the state. The grant would come in the form of matched funds, with the state foundation contributing \$1 for every \$2 Heartland Community Foundation raises, Muirhead said.

If this grant is awarded, other fundraising initiatives will be explored to raise additional dollars for community health care.

"It's a great challenge for us," Lowen said. "A great challenge to take on. Hopefully, they'll approve the grant, then we need to hit the streets, get some additional support and really build this thing."

If the GROW funds are awarded, the board will work with health care providers to determine how the funds could best be used, Lowen said.

In the meantime, the foundation will continue efforts on its initial founder's campaign, which is about halfway toward its goal of raising \$630,000. The group also hopes to boost membership and introduce itself to the community.

Despite a national economic downturn, the board is optimistic the situation is improving and will continue efforts to grow the foundation, Muirhead said.

"Like many things in the past year with the economy, it was certainly a bit more difficult to proceed at the rate we wanted to," he said. "But now with this program, I think it adds another push to us, and certainly, it's a fantastic cause. This is really going to help us, I think, in a lot of ways."

In the past two years, the foundation, which serves Ellis, Trego and Rooks counties, has picked up more than 50 founding donors.

The board also hopes more businesses will sign on for permanently endowed funds. Currently, four organizations have established "savings accounts" with the foundation, which is an affiliate of the Greater Salina Community Foundation.

The group has distributed more than \$42,000 to other community organizations.

"A goal of ours is to help people know what we are and what we do, so they can step forward and help us build something here for the area," Lowen said. "We can do a lot of nice things down the road in the future if we have the funds to do it."

For more information about the foundation, call (785) 621-4090, or visit [www.heartlandcommunityfoundation.org](http://www.heartlandcommunityfoundation.org).