

Leaders to discuss community priorities

By THERESA CHURCHILL - H&R Senior Writer | Posted: Wednesday, November 4, 2009 4:00 am

DECATUR - A meeting is being organized to bring educators together with work force and economic development specialists to discuss how well federal economic stimulus funds are helping the community pull out of the recession.

The Decatur Jobs Council, a coalition of social service agencies working to remove employment barriers for the disadvantaged, is pulling together the meeting for Nov. 19 with assistance from the Chicago Jobs Council.

Steve Simmons, statewide policy associate for the Chicago council, told members of the Decatur council Tuesday that the meeting would involve breaking into small groups to brainstorm strategies for addressing community needs, followed by a report back to the larger group.

"The groups really identify a top three priority list," Simmons said.

He added the Chicago Jobs Council will prepare a summary of the meeting for distribution to participants for use as they see fit.

Vickie Buckingham, neighborhood programs manager for the city of Decatur, remarked that the timing of the meeting would fit in well with meetings this month to receive public input about the community's needs for the city's five-year plan.

Those meetings are 4 p.m. Nov. 17 in classrooms A and B at the Decatur Civic Center and 6 p.m. Nov. 24 at the Decatur Public Library.

In other business, the Decatur Jobs Council on Tuesday learned that a community gardening project, Decatur Is Growing Gardeners, has been awarded a \$6,300 grant from the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, harvested more than 600 pounds of vegetables this year and donated 575 pounds of that to the Northeast Community Fund and the Good Samaritan Inn.

President Sue Hemp said that David McLaughlin, associate professor of horticulture at Richland Community College, is developing a six- to eight-week noncredit gardening class that DIGG participants can take early next year. She added that Garfield Montessori School and Main Street Church of the Living God are interested in partnering with her organization.

"I feel like we've accomplished a lot this year, but we're still really looking at how exactly we want to proceed," Hemp said.

In another update, Missy Batman, chairwoman of the jobs council, said that she and Lucy Murphy, executive director of the Community Foundation of Decatur/Macon County, met recently with a representative of Community Collaboration Inc.

She said the company provides Web-based software that would allow social service agencies to share information about clients.

To give an example of how this would work, Batman said the Decatur School District already is sharing

information about student behavior and attendance with the Boys & Girls Club of Decatur.

"So when Walt Smith (club executive director) gets the kids in the evenings, he can say, 'If you want to be part of the basketball team, you've got to be working at school, too,' " she said.

Batman, who is finance director for the community foundation, said this could help agencies see the whole family and the whole picture in serving clients.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Community meeting to discuss economic and workforce development needs

WHEN: 10 a.m. to noon Thursday, Nov. 19

WHERE: Madden Auditorium of the Decatur Public Library, 130 N. Franklin St.

ORGANIZING GROUPS: Chicago Jobs Council, Decatur Jobs Council, Decatur Area Education Coalition, city of Decatur, Economic Development Corporation of Decatur and Macon County, Decatur is Growing Gardeners, Dove Inc., Spannaus Consulting and Workforce Investment Solutions.

RSVP: By Thursday, Nov. 12, by contacting Missy Batman at mbatman@endowdecatur.org 429-3000.

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