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Maryville (MO) Community 2000

When then-Maryville, MO, City Manager David Angerer first started on the job, he presented to his city council an ordinance banning open containers of alcohol in moving vehicles. The ordinance failed.

Then, the city's parks and recreation director tried to bring up a similar ordinance. The city council didn't even put it on its agenda.

In late 1997, *Maryville Community 2000*, a coalition working to stamp out underage drinking and alcohol misuse in and around Nodaway County in far Northwest Missouri, took on the issue. With the help of Mr. Angerer and others, the coalition got the city council to unanimously pass an ordinance banning open containers of alcohol in vehicles in June, 1999.

"This is a step in the right direction," said Margaret Pierson, a community volunteer with *Maryville Community 2000*.

Maryville Community 2000 began 10 years ago as part of a statewide initiative to reduce alcohol misuse, tobacco use, drug use and violent behavior. *Maryville Community 2000* had chosen to address underage drinking. Elizabeth Argo of Assets in Motion (AIM) said that in rural areas across the country, alcohol misuse is prevalent. In addition, surveys done by community groups in Maryville time and again show people are concerned with alcohol misuse, especially among teens.

Most notably, according to Pierson, a 1997 survey distributed in schools and through newspapers on what issues the group should tackle showed that 90 percent of the 598 respondents thought alcohol was a problem among underage drinkers, and 79 percent thought it was a problem among adults.

In battling underage drinking and alcohol misuse, the groups that made up *Maryville Community 2000* and AIM had a couple of formidable obstacles. Maryville, though it has a population of only 10,000, is a university town. And it's in Missouri, a state housing one of the biggest brewery operations in the nation.

But the *Maryville Community 2000* coalition, and AIM in particular, have had success using the model of developmental assets as spelled out by the Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN. These assets are 40 identified factors that youth need in their lives to ensure they grow up to become caring, competent, responsible adults living productive lives. Argo said the beauty of this approach is that it doesn't target just one child a time, but targets all children in the community.

One of *Maryville Community 2000's* biggest successes to date has been to get an open container ordinance passed. The coalition began its battle for an ordinance prohibiting open containers of alcohol in public places within the Maryville city limits in December 1997, and kept up its fight until an ordinance finally passed the city council in June 1999. The final ordinance didn't give the coalition everything it wanted – it only banned open containers in vehicles – but the coalition still considered the ordinance it did get a success.

> "This is a step in **the right direction"**

The coalition started by talking to a group of people who had gotten an ordinance passed requiring that tobacco products be kept behind the counter at retail outlets. From this group, the *Maryville Community 2000* coalition learned about working with the county sheriff's office and the city public safety department to help in its quest to get an open container ordinance passed.

"Then we asked ourselves what problems we hoped to reduce with this ordinance, how the passage of an ordinance would address these problems, and what kind of comparative evidence we had that such an ordinance would be effective," Pierson said.

The coalition then looked at other Midwest cities with high alcohol-use populations and asked if they had open

container ordinances, and at what level. In surveying the 33 communities, the coalition found that 85 percent had some level of open container ordinance on their books. Of those, 89 percent had at least a level 2 ordinance, banning open containers in public parks and streets, and the ordinances had been on the books for an average of 19.2 years.

The coalition also held a forum to determine what level of ordinance the community preferred and what would most likely pass. Over 160 people attended. The panel consisted of an emergency room nurse, the city's director of public safety, the director of campus safety for Northwest Missouri State, two others representing campus organizations, a bar owner, an city council representative, four university students, and a high school student.

One example of AIM's work has been a newsletter that has gone to parents of students in 29 schools in eight counties around Maryville. AIM distributed the newsletters this summer at back to school fairs held for needy families receiving back to school supplies.

The surveys of parents who received the newsletters showed that 78 percent hadn't heard of asset development before the fairs, but 83 percent said they would practice the suggestions in the newsletter, and 96 percent said they wanted to continue receiving information.

Argo said, "One of the comments we received was, 'For all the parents who have ever wished that children were born with individualized handbooks, I recommend Assets in Motion universally. Thanks. Keep up the good work.'"

The letters continue to go out monthly to the parents through the middle and high school students in the eight-county region.

Another project AIM has initiated with *ACCESS 2000*, a group that focuses on career exploration and leadership, is a one-day workshop, "Building Communities with Character." AIM and *ACCESS 2000* invited three seventh graders and three eighth graders from each of the 29 school districts in the area to participate, and in the November 2000 workshop, kids from 17 districts came. The workshop focused on character education, asset development, and civic responsibility.

"We got them excited about giving back to the community," Argo said. "The kids developed action plans for getting involved in the community."

Before the workshop, eight percent of the students had not volunteered in the community before. Because of the action plans–one for each school district–all of them had become community volunteers, and 84 percent were encouraged to take part in other community service projects besides the plan. One student in the evaluation stated, "Your organization is helping me to be more helpful in our community and to become a better leader. Thanks a bunch!"

> "The kids developed action plans for getting **involved in the community.**"

AIM also sponsors a Safe Homes Project, designed to promote a safer home environment for children through positive peer pressure among parents. The voluntary program involves parents of teenagers signing a pledge that they will not allow parties at their homes when they are not present, that they will not serve alcohol to minors, and they will let other parents know if they see other parents' children using alcohol or drugs. Parents of elementary school-age children sign pledges saying they will provide adult supervision when their children have friends over; will securely store alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and other hazardous materials, will monitor computer games, video games, and movies; and will provide a safe, drug free environment at home.

The groups that make up *Maryville Community 2000* learned a lot as it worked to curb alcohol misuse, Pierson said. For one thing, she notes, money is not always needed to effect change. The effort to pass an open container law took a lot of work, but very little money.

The coalition members also learned that people will work together to resolve an issue if they think change is needed, to recognize the efforts and positive changes people and organizations make, and to celebrate whatever wins come their way.

"Changing behavior is a long process," Pierson said, "with a lot of small processes along the way."

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"For this community success story and others from across the Southwest region, visit our website at http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html