

Little Chute makes progress in planning for the future

By Brian Roebke, Editor

Article originally appeared in the Times-Villager on March 15, 2008.

Advance Little Chute, Inc. has taken a lead role in developing a vision for the community and they made a lot of progress toward that effort on Tuesday.

Karen Eischen, executive director of the Pella, Iowa, Chamber of Commerce, was in town to help facilitate some discussions.

The day started with a 7 a.m. breakfast presentation by Eischen at the Gerard Van Hoof Civic Center and Library.

At 9:15, 18 people, including Little Chute residents, took part in a design and planning tour to evaluate the village's look and feel.

The last event of the day was a repeat of the morning presentation at 6 p.m. at Little Chute Elementary School. About 70 people participated in the day's events.

Eischen was brought to Little Chute because of her involvement with Pella, a town of 10,000 people in central Iowa, which has developed a tourism program based on their Dutch heritage over the past 40 years, and built a windmill in 2002.

Eischen said, "This has been a wonderful trip. Hopefully everyone in Little Chute has learned something from me, but I also take a few things that I'm going to take back to my community."

She said that was exciting. "I think everybody can learn and share from everybody else."

Robin Dekker, executive director of Advance Little Chute, Inc., thought the day was a huge success.

"We really got a lot of people out to participate not only in the presentations, but also the design tour, so we're real happy," she said. "I think it was inspirational for everybody who got to hear Karen speak."

Dekker thinks the day will get a lot of ideas flowing in people's heads. "I know that this event is hosted by Advance Little Chute, and our group is pretty inspired by that and we want to share that with the business community and other organizations to definitely keep the village moving forward."

Janet Verstegen, secretary of the ALC, also thought it was a very beneficial day.

"We had a lot of groups participating and coming to hear this," she said. "For a lot of them, it was the first time they've heard about Pella, and seen photos of Pella, so I thought it really introduced Pella and showed what we could do here in Little Chute real well."

The tour was an eye-opener for many of the participants, who saw some things they didn't realize about their village.

After the tour, the group met at the civic center to list the places they liked and areas that needed improvement, including trying to get the commercial buildings converted to a Dutch or old world theme.

Eischen told the group what she thought were positives and negatives. She liked the lock tender houses by the river as well as the downtown streetscape, but thought the overhead wires were eye clutter, didn't see a lot of historic buildings, and thought the commercial signage was inconsistent throughout the village.

"It did get them thinking," Verstegen said. "We want to take another tour when the snow is off the ground because we realized the ground was pretty snowy."

Verstegen said the process of reinvigorating the village will continue.

"I think it raised awareness and now we're going to start talking a little more at the village board about the design manual," she said. "We're going to be discussing where we want it to go and what kind of track we want it on."