

Fulfilling ‘needs and dreams’

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Foundation is preparing to give millions to promote health in area

POTTSTOWN – One of the major components in the sale of the Pottstown Memorial Medical Center was the creation of a non-profit organization dedicated to improve the health and wellness of area residents.

That organization is the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, and while it’s still in its infancy, the group plans to contribute millions of dollars in grants to community entities that need the help. It has an endowment of about \$65 million.

Right now, the foundation is analyzing the data from a needs assessment before it begins making key grant decisions.

“A key word is listening,” said Dave Kraybill, the recently appointed executive director of the foundation. “That will help define what the mission of the foundation will be.”

Because the foundation – and its top administrator – are new, there aren’t many concrete plans Kraybill can discuss.

The needs assessment involved interviewing 1,000 people by phone and conducting 70 in-depth interviews with area businesses and non-profit organizations. Kraybill has only been on the job two weeks when he spoke to The Mercury, but he said he had already begun to get a feel for the community.

“A lot of people care about the region and one another,” Kraybill said. “We’re very delighted to be in a community that takes the time to care.”

Kraybill comes to the Health and Wellness Foundation after leading non-profit campaigns in western Pennsylvania and for Penn State University. He was the founding president and executive director of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, which gave out more than \$1 million in grants by 2000. Most recently, he served as the director of development for Penn State’s Commonwealth College.

He said he found out about the position from a friend and realized he was a good fit after meeting members of the foundation’s board.

“When they’re interviewing you, you’re interviewing them,” Kraybill said.

He said he was impressed with area residents’ sense of identity and noticed that locals “will stick to their guns” if they feel strongly about something.

He said the foundation serves a serious need because many local non-profits are lacking and the area “doesn’t have a strong history of grant giving.”

He feels his background puts him in a position to change that.

“I’ve worked for foundations and also had to ask for grants in that role,” Kraybill said. “It’s important to be strong on both sides of the table.”

Kraybill added that he’s familiar with blue-collar towns, having worked in Johnstown in western Pennsylvania.

“I think Pottstown is going through a transition, and Johnstown continues to go through a transition,” he said.

So who exactly stands to benefit from the foundation’s coffers?

It’s too soon to say, Kraybill said.

“It’s a very dynamic process,” he said. “It’s informed by the needs assessment: What are the needs and dreams of the region as it relates to health and wellness?”

The foundation is set up to contribute to organizations that assist people within 10 miles of Pottstown, but that doesn’t mean they have to be based in that location.

Non-profits must “demonstrate they are serving the needs of the tri-county area,” Kraybill said, in order to be considered for grants.

“The hospital was built by people from the region, and the assets from the sale should go to help people that are committed and rooted in their communities.”