

Sharing dreams and service key to Brownsville's future

By Christine Haines chains@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Tuesday, January 22, 2013 2:15 am

BROWNSVILLE – Martin Luther King Jr. Day was marked in Brownsville with a community meeting to find out what the townspeople want for the community and to give them opportunities to make their dreams a reality.

“It’s a time to have events that are in the spirit of Martin Luther King, and what he wanted was a beloved community where people were active and engaged in the places where they live,” said Sara Goots, one of the AmeriCorps workers with the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corp. who organized the community event.

Goots and Jamie Brackman, who is also with AmeriCorps, asked those attending the forum to focus on what the community has, what the community wants and what members of the community can do to move those projects forward.

About 25 people attended the event, including Frank Ricco, owner of Brownsville Bus Lines, who has been in business in Brownsville since 1948.

“I’m like Martin Luther King, I have a dream. If we don’t start building something in this town, we’re going to die. You can tear all the buildings down you want; it’s not going to improve the community. If we build one building to show we’re making progress, we’ll show something,” Ricco said.

“My dream is to tear the old Brownsville Hospital down that is on Church Street. That is a prime location and I’m talking with contractors so we can build some homes there.”

Johnny Rugola of Republic said that even though he is from a neighboring community, he loves Brownsville.

“To see it this way is heartbreaking, but there is also an opportunity to turn it around,” Rugola said.

Rugola said he loves railroad history and would love to see a rails-to-trails project along the old railroad line between Brownsville and Republic.

“There are some really neat structures along there,” Rugola said.

Rugola said he was encouraged by the forum and is looking into volunteer opportunities.

"I'm up for doing anything. I want to see something going on," Rugola said.

Dave Zuchowski suggested that Brownsville have a Bridge Day, when one of the bridges over the Monongahela River is closed to motorists and opened to pedestrians, with activities on the bridge, similar to what has been done in other states.

Cat Salvatore, who is with the Student Conservation Association working with the River Town program, said she grew up in Waterbury, Conn. and has seen her hometown go from being a declining industrial town to rebirth.

"When I first came here, I was amazed at how much this reminds me of where I came from," Salvatore said. "There are a lot of really optimistic people here.

You need to celebrate that. If you can remain dedicated to what you're doing, I believe I will see changes if I come back in five or 10 years."

A big change that is in the works in the community is the development of a park in downtown Brownsville spurred by the Students in Action at Brownsville Area High School. Brownsville Council President Jack Lawver said it is a project that has united the town.

"It happened at the right time when plans were starting to come together," Lawver said, noting that the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority had recently acquired buildings and was tearing them down as the students presented their plans for a downtown stage which has evolved into a park. "It pulled the people together and once you have that support, you can make it happen," Lawver said.

Brackman said additional community forums will be scheduled over the next several months in order to keep Monday's momentum going.



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BARC holds revitalaton workshop

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Brownsville Mayor Lester Ward (left) speaks about ongoing efforts to revitalize Brownsville during a workshop hosted by Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation (BARC) Monday evening. The workshop, moderated by Americorps service members Jamie Brackman (center) and Sarah Goots (right), was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy of service and activism.