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**When you support  
Extension,  
community  
stakeholders apply  
outsider perspectives  
to increase tourism,  
in-migration  
and community  
economic  
investment.**



# COOPERATIVE EXTENSION EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE *Changing Lives*



*Program volunteers captured the first impression that visitors and prospective residents experience as they enter Pulaski County.*

## **Extension Brings Perspective to Communities Interested in Attracting New Residents and Visitors**

*The First Impressions Program enabled community stakeholders to see their community through the eyes of a visitor and develop a plan to promote community and economic development.*

**“They [program volunteers] drove into the county from different directions. They talked with people ... they got first impressions ... about education, health care, businesses ... all facets of the community. This was not a quick study, but a six-month process.”**

*Bobby Clue, Executive Director, Somerset-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce*

The First Impressions Program is an Extension program active in several states aimed at assisting community stakeholders with their tourism and resident attraction efforts. The Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK), an Extension outreach unit in the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, introduced the program to Kentucky in 2015 garnering great interest from communities across the state. CEDIK ensures that communities of any size can participate in the program and benefit from the process. The First Impressions Program can mobilize a community into a state of readiness for larger community and economic development projects.

Central to the First Impressions Program process are the anonymous visits to the community to collect information on the community's amenities. CEDIK works with the community stakeholders to determine the particular type of feedback they are interested in hearing, i.e., early career professionals, empty nester's, or recent retirees, and then recruits volunteers accordingly. Program volunteers complete a thorough assessment of the community. They drive into and through the community from all major routes, visit businesses, speak with people from the community, and take pictures and detailed notes of their experiences.

CEDIK collects the constructive feedback from the program volunteers and compiles the information into a report as well as a public presentation to the community. Community stakeholders, such as economic developers, the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses, as well as locally elected leadership and community residents, are presented with the information, and then have the option to participate in a CEDIK facilitated process of developing action plans based on the feedback.

Lyon County, Kentucky, like many rural communities across the state and nation, has seen population shifts from job relocations, business closure and migration. In an effort to gain information and ideas on how to promote Lyon County and its assets, the local Extension Office, the County Judge Executive's Office, and CEDIK partnered to bring the First Impressions program to Lyon County. Based on the feedback from the First Impressions report,



*Program volunteers noted “More signs to wonderful places on the lake would be helpful.” As a result, Lyon County officials have installed new signs and improved navigation within the community.*

community members identified and prioritized responsive action steps. One priority was to improve direction signs for visitors, resulting in new signage for the marinas and restaurants in the county, as well as the community park. Lyon County officials have asked CEDIK to coordinate another round of visits to ensure that the improvements are impacting new visitor's experiences.

In Pulaski County, stakeholders were surprised to see their community listed as a “Top Retirement Destination” in a national magazine story, and reached out to learn how they might better position themselves to receive more retirees in their community. By organizing a team of volunteers near retirement age, CEDIK was able to help them gather helpful information they needed. After the public First Impressions report there have been changes in Pulaski County. Golf courses in the county have rebranded and launched new marketing campaigns, the local realtor's association has refocused their marketing strategy, and the Lake Cumberland Cycling club is now working to raise the visibility of biking opportunities in the county and region. A local committee is even working to understand how to communicate the Pulaski County communities' identity through public art.

The First Impressions program motivates citizens to help their community project its best impression!