Meeting Notes – Apr. 2, 2024

The LaFayette Rotary Club held its weekly meeting on Tuesday, April 2, 2024.  Rotarian Laura Smith introduced her guest speaker for our program, Adrian Holloway.  Adrian is a nurse by profession and works as an administrator for Chattahoochee Hospice and as a community liaison for Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative (ENI).  Adrian is a native of LaFayette and feels she is called to serve people, especially those in the community she loves.

ENI is a grant and functions in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control, the University of Alabama, and the Alabama Department of Public Health.  In addition, there are several community partners helping to implement this grant, including Auburn University Outreach, UNITE, East Alabama Mental Health, the City of LaFayette, LaFayette Emergency Medical Services (EMS), LaFayette High School, and Make Me Anew.

ENI was born out of COVID.  The initiative identified communities that were underserved, underprivileged and displayed health disparities.  LaFayette was selected as one of 20 communities, mostly rural, to receive the grant in order to create healthier communities.  The grant was for a total of $7.7 million.  One of the first steps in the initiative was for each community to identify a community liaison, someone who could identify the needs of their particular community.  Adrian was selected as the liaison for LaFayette.  Next, an Adult Advisory Committee was established.  Some of those members include DeAnna Hand, executive director of LaFayette Main Street; Chambers County Fire Chief Doody; UNIITE; and Rachel Snoddy, Chambers County Extension Service coordinator.  In addition, a Youth Advisory Council was established.  A survey was taken of LaFayette-area residents to determine local issues and needs.  The overarching need was access to health care (physical, mental, community) and a health equity plan was created to address the need.  The top three physical/medical needs identified were high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.  The top three community issues identified were alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and poor dietary habits.

One of the challenges that comes with any grant is sustainability--how to keep the programs and activities going once the grant money is no longer available.  Adrian is addressing this in several ways, including becoming a trainer herself or having others trained in various areas such as mental health (identifying issues and connecting to resources), grant writing, and how to establish a 501c3 corporation.  While identifying community needs is crucial and a big part of her job, Adrian does not believe identification is enough.  She has been working on creating a resource directory for our community.  Resources are available but are often underutilized.

In a recent competition in which youth councils participated, all groups mentioned mental health as a need.  To address this, ENI is working with LaFayette High School to create a safe space within the school where a student can go to decompress before a situation escalates. Other proactive practices are being implemented as well as a result of the survey and grant. One of these activities is Convo and Cardio.  On Thursdays, residents get together to walk and talk about what they want to see for LaFayette, their vision for the future.  Groundbreaking is planned to take place in May at the original LaFayette City Park for a new Healing Zone.  There will be walking and bike trails, picnic tables, exercise equipment and a sensory component for individuals with sensory impairments and/or autism.  Another idea/dream being discussed is turning a vacant school building, such as J. P. Powell, into a community center.  The thought is to locate services for physical and mental health, financial classes, and classes on healthy living options all in one location.  They are also hoping to widen the number of sports options available to our youth beyond football, basketball, and baseball.

Diane Sherriff