

# South Seneca County towns get \$95,000 health grant

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OVID — The physical, economic, environmental and social health of 10,000 residents in Seneca County's four southernmost towns may improve, thanks to a grant of up to \$95,000.

The Greater Rochester Health Foundation announced the award Wednesday.

The money will pay for a resident-driven, asset- and neighborhood-based health improvement project. It marks the first step in a three-phase approach to improve neighborhood health in southern Seneca County.

An assessment will determine the strengths and needs of the four towns when viewed as one community.

The award was \$20,000 more than anticipated. The S2AY Rural Health Network Inc., an affiliation of public health departments in Seneca, Schuyler, Steuben, Yates, Ontario and Wayne counties dedicated to improving health outcomes in those regions, will distribute the money toward projects initiated through a special committee formed by the towns of Lodi, Covert, Romulus and Ovid.

"[The grant is] an investment in the Health Foundation's Neighborhood Health Status Improvement Initiative, a long-term strategy that acknowledged that where you live, the social, economic and environmental conditions of your neighborhood, can have an impact on your health and ability to engage in a healthy lifestyle," foundation representative Lynette Loomis said.

Lodi, Covert, Romulus and Ovid had to convince the foundation that the geographic area of southern Seneca County, despite its large size, is by definition a neighborhood with common interests, characteristics and problems.

The foundation has no say in how the grant money is used.

"We are confident that the S2AY Network and local residents will be successful in this endeavor and will identify many community strengths on which to build or create a healthier community," foundation President and CEO John Urban said.

Board of Directors chairwoman Essie Calhoun-McDavid said "Strong neighborhoods and communities are vital to the achievement of health, and we have learned that community residents are key to transforming their environments into healthier places to live," foundation Board of Directors chairwoman Essie Calhoun-McDavid added.

Residents of the four towns have named their project Seneca Towns Engaging People for Solutions, or STEPS. The project will be housed at Finger Lakes Community Health's new, 7150 N. Main St.

clinic in Ovid.

Mary Theresa Lahr has been hired as project assessment coordinator. Anyone with questions can contact Lahr at [mtlahr@gmail.com](mailto:mtlahr@gmail.com) or (315) 651-9919.

Other community partners and revenue sources will provide the rest of the money for the first year of STEPS, which carries a price tag of \$127,810.

Most of the money would go to the salaries and benefits of Lahr and half-time outreach coordinator Eileen Schmidt.

Other funds will go toward resident health promotion projects; computer, software, printer and LCD projector; office space and utilities; telephone and Internet; and travel.

“These projects are designed to build on strengths, not weaknesses,” Loomis said. “It’s up to the community to decide what they want to do to address their needs.”

When foundation representatives visited southern Seneca County during the summer, the local committee presented their case for the grant, citing challenges the four towns face. One major obstacle has been overcoming the economic hit resulting from the closure of the Seneca Army Depot and Willard Psychiatric Center, both major employers.

Some of the priorities identified were:

- Training for volunteer coaches.
- Diabetic screenings.
- Promotion of dial-a-ride programs.
- Ambulance and emergency responder equipment and training.
- An after school project.
- Cemetery upkeep with volunteers.
- Nutrition, diabetes, weight and blood pressure clinics.
- A nature trail behind the Interlaken school.
- Walking trail promotion.
- Organizing volunteers to transport people to appointments, help with groceries and other needs.
- Community gardens.
- Sidewalk improvements and house numbering.
- Water system improvements and property management programs.