

Chisago Lakes looks beyond America's Best competition

As a new year approaches, and the ABC competition nears completion, ABC team leaders begin with the end in mind by looking toward the winners announcement in April 2017 and beyond the competition.

The ABC team has achieved a number of its goals and is well on its way to achieving others. The team has helped reduce the cost of energy through establishment of a Clean Energy Hub that offered free energy audits for local businesses and reduced-cost audits for residences. At least one local business is already on its way to saving thousands on its energy bill thanks to this audit.

The team brought local communities and government bodies together to expand walking and bike trails and to create the Chisago Lakes Water Trail, which highlights the area's strongest feature, its lakes. The team bolstered community access to technology by establishing a publicly accessible videoconference center at the Chisago Lakes Area Public Library and working with Frontier to improve broadband and to develop WiFi hotspots in each of ABC's five communities. A new shared logo represents the Chisago Lakes Area and each of its five communities, and a new Chisago Lakes website is about to launch. A stronger partnership between local schools and local businesses is improving career options for the workforce of the future. Local health care providers and Chisago County Public Health are partnering to improve community health and workplace wellness. The team has won awards that recognize success in bringing local communities together to take a closer look at use of energy, technology and

improve overall quality of the local community's life.

"Having reached many of our goals, we feel confident that we can continue to build on this success and replicate these projects throughout our area in the future," says Tangi Schaapveld, local ABC coordinator.

The ABC team also continues to mobilize members of the community by providing leadership—asking themselves what they would like to accomplish, determining the best way to accomplish it and then identifying the people who have the knowledge and expertise to achieve success.

During the 11-month implementation phase of the competition, team leaders tapped into the Chisago Lakes Community Foundation, the Chisago County EDA/HRA, the Chisago Lakes Area Schools, small and large business leaders, area health care providers and Chisago County Public Health. They brought together local manufacturers to discuss their workforce needs, and interviewed outside experts to learn about their experience and success stories. This shared knowledge and expertise has been key in making positive progress toward their goals in the areas of energy conservation, economic development, trail development, access to technology, areawide marketing and enhanced quality of life.

The winners of America's Best Communities competition will be announced in April 2017. While the Chisago Lakes community is keeping its eye on the prize, the ABC team has begun looking beyond the competition. They are building collaboration and resources to continue work-



ing on enhancing community health, further expanding broadband access, and improving postsecondary education and career options for the workforce of the future.

If you would like to be part of ABC and the team's efforts, please contact Tangi Schaapveld, abcchisagolake-sarea@gmail.com, or the Chisago Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce at 651-257-1177.

About America's Best Communities

America's Best Communities is a multi-stage, three-year competition that is providing \$4 million in seed money and other support to assist communities as they develop new economic growth strategies. The top three communities — those with innovative revitalization proposals being effectively implemented — will share a total of \$6 million in grand prize money. The winning community will be awarded \$3 million, with \$2 million for second place and \$1 million for third. To learn more, visit americasbestcommunities.com.

