

Generations tend to want same amenities, research shows

By Edle Ross - The Hutchinson News - eross@hutchnews.com

Community growth advocates this week came together with one common goal - to make the Hutchinson community a destination for the up-and-coming generation.

And while many community leaders agree it's important to become a place the next generation wants to live, they say those efforts can't come at the expense of the older generation that already calls Hutchinson home.

With more than a quarter of Reno County's population aged 55 years or more, leaders must gauge whether what makes Hutchinson attractive to the Millennial Generation will make it unattractive to their parents and grandparents.

While research shows that older and younger generations often enjoy the same types of amenities and opportunities, philosophical differences in the ways older and younger individuals look at society and community could cause some friction.

Similar 'wants'

Data indicates that empty-nest baby boomers often want the same amenities and opportunities as Millennials - vibrant downtowns, locally owned bars and restaurants, population density and enrichment opportunities, according to Rebecca Ryan, author of "Live First, Work Second" and founder of Next Generation Consulting.

Locally, there is anecdotal evidence supporting that data.

Pam Lyle, vice president of administrative services for Wesley Towers, said baby boomers are the segment of the population beginning to show interest in the facility.

Through conversations with potential residents, Lyle has learned that the older generation, like its younger counterpart, is placing importance on wellness, arts and culture, entertainment and opportunities for enrichment.

"I have to laugh," she said. "I have children who have moved back to Hutchinson to raise their children. They want a lot of the same things I want.

"And I'm seeing a lot of my residents wanting those same things as well. So we have three generations wanting the same basic things. I don't think there will be a culture clash at all. There will be a joining."

Philosophical differences

Still, there are "significant" philosophical differences in the way older and younger individuals view society and community, said Laszlo J. Kulcsar, professor of sociology at Kansas State University and director of the Kansas Population Center.

And those differences could lead to friction.

For example, Hutchinson City Council members last month noted that generational differences seemed to fuel the debate over whether Hutchinson should allow ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts events.

The group in favor of the events - mostly younger people - reasoned that those who didn't like ultimate fighting could voice their opinion by not attending the events.

Those opposed - mostly older residents - said ultimate fighting was violent and therefore was not in the best interest of society and should not be allowed.

Kulcsar said those differences in perspectives are typical, should be expected and can be worked through.

What is not so typical, Kulcsar added, is the baby boomer generation and how it can at one time be an asset and a hindrance to young people trying to be engaged in and change a community.

Need to connect

Prior to the baby boom, older individuals were more apt to assume the typical role of an "older" person. They would contribute wisdom, but were not the ones to initiate change in society.

Baby boomers, on the other hand, are more likely to want to continue to contribute to societal improvement and change, even in their retirement years, Kulcsar said.

"The baby boomer generation is a revolutionary generation," Kulcsar said. "In many ways they are more innovative than the generations that came before them. So, in one sense, the current young generation will have an easier situation in trying to make changes considering that baby boomers are playing the role of the older generation."

On the other hand, baby boomers' inherent desire to lead could cause problems.

"Baby boomers have a large birth cohort and have had to compete for everything throughout their life," Kulcsar said. "College, jobs, promotions - they never really got anything easy, which means they are used to being very active and making their voice heard. Because of that, they are more likely to occupy positions on boards and committees instead of allowing younger people to step in."

Obstacles to young people's involvement in the community will hurt both efforts to recruit and retain young people, said Aubrey Abbott Patterson, executive director of the Hutchinson Community Foundation.

"Being engaged and connected is what will make people stay," Patterson said. "We must make certain we're not losing the best and brightest to other communities. The people who get involved and engaged will be the same people who go to arts and culture events, who patronize businesses, who support nonprofits.

"There is a lot of benefit to having them here and helping them feel connected to the community."

It seems at least some community groups recognize those benefits and are responding accordingly.

Lynnette Hilty, president of the Hutchinson Rotary Club, said that organization is experiencing an influx of younger members.

Older members are not only accepting the younger members themselves, but also their ideas, Hilty said.

"We're seeing younger members who want to be involved in our board and who are bringing out new ideas," Hilty said. "I've seen the older members embrace that."

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Attention City Leaders : 2/15/2009

The statement's made in this article clearly give the answers to the questions, thank you for your honesty. When you say that 1/4 of the population is age 55 or above and should not feel the brunt of growth (as in tax dollars), ask yourself one question. Who was feeling the brunt of growth when those 55 year olds were 15 years old? The generation prior to them were feeling that, and that is typically the way generations work. You enjoy what the generation prior to you worked for. Right now, Hutchinson is enjoying what the 55 year old generation worked for..which basically hasn't changed in 35 years and is crying out for more. The city has become stagnant, and yet city leaders feel that the older generation shouldn't feel the brunt of growth? They haven't had to anyway have they? This is just another indication that the city is swayed to protect the interests of the "retirement community." Instead of beating around the bush, why not be straight forward and let the city know that there will be limited options increased for the city due to the fact that 25 out of 100 people have more pull than 75 out of 100 people all due to age and the desire to keep the retirement city of Hutch just as it is for them? I posted on here a few days ago asking what business ventures fell through, what has the city aggressively attempted to do to support the economy for this city. I have not received a reply. But I will go out on a limb and read your minds Mr. and Mrs. City Leaders. Here is the deal: Jobs=growth..Jobs=stable economy within the city....and when you are retired, you aren't worried about jobs. And when you are heavily influenced by the retirement community, you do your best to make them happy. But what about the other 75 people out of 100? This is why the city will die when the retirement population dies.....you are not setting up the future today, for tomorrow.

Wake up already

Whoa..... : 2/15/2009

Someone needs to read the above over and over again. Doesn't this actually sum it all up? I too have a prediction: The city of Hutch will slowly die. Thanks to the city of Hutch for padding their pockets while allowing it all to go down the tubes. I think I'm going to move, I can't take it anymore.

Future move-out

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