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Special needs group plans fundraising effort to cover land costs

By Zach Warner
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A Southlake-based group's quest to find land on which to create a self-sustaining community for special needs adults now includes plans to hold a fundraiser and provide financial assistance for people who cannot afford housing at the future site.

Members of the group, recently changing their name to the Texas ACORN Foundation, gave a report at a meeting on Oct. 4 at Carroll Senior High School that detailed changes they have made in their approach since the initiative first started this past summer.

The foundation also reported that they have identified 400 acres near Sanger that they are examining as a potential spot for the proposed community, as the group is working with North Texas SNAP (Special Needs Assistance Programs) in a joint effort to secure property.

Karen Dydek, co-founder of ACORN (Adult Community Outward Reaching Neighborhood), said that an increase in the number of participants aiding in the effort has been remarkable.

"It's probably grown 10-fold since we first began," said Dydek, a social worker for Tarrant County that has a special needs child of her own. "That's almost scary how quickly it's grown. But that just re-affirms that in this area, we have a need."

Because of that need, the foundation intends to begin their fundraising effort within the month. Tickets for a drawing to win a Mini-Cooper, provided by the Moritz-Mini of the North Arlington Dealership, will soon be available for purchase at local businesses, churches and banks.

Fliers will be handed out at upcoming football games, detailing a fundraising

party that the organization plans to hold in December. Members of ACORN are discussing with Carroll administrators the possibility of holding the fundraising party in the parking lot of Carroll's Dragon Stadium.

The foundation has not only set methods to help cover the costs of purchasing land, but has also determined that they would like to establish an endowment that allows for fee adjustments on a sliding scale for those who are unable to afford the costs of sending a special needs adult to the facility.

"That's been our biggest concern - the people needing social assistant are usually the people that can't afford it," Dydek said.

Amelia Dye, co-founder of ACORN along with Dydek, said Tarrant County was where the organization originally sought for property, but the Sanger property, located in Denton County, has proven to be a much better possibility.

"People were worried about purchasing land in Denton, due to their lack of MHMR (Mental Health/Mental Retardation) services, but most everyone is going to be self-supporting anyway," Dye said.

The plan to raise funds, purchase land and staff the facility is expected to be complete in three to five years, according to Dye.

"The only thing that's holding everyone back is the money," she said. "Once we get the land, we'll be on the map and people will see us and know we're serious about providing this service."

The Texas ACORN foundation plans to hold its next meeting in December at a date and time yet to be determined.