

## Residents discuss strategy in seeking special needs land

**BY ZACH WARNER**

Southlake Journal

When about 100 area residents attended an informational meeting at Carroll Senior High on Aug. 23 to discuss the need to find land for a special-needs community in the tri-county region, the message delivered by coordinators of the meeting was clear.

“We’re going to make this happen,” said Karen Dydek, a Tarrant County social worker. “I believe in my gut that we’re going to make this happen.”

Dydek, along with Carroll Life Skills teacher Amelia Dye, organized and spearheaded the meeting. The two hoped to bring awareness to community members of the desire and need for building a living community in Tarrant, Denton or Dallas county that would be similar to that of Marbridge, a 300-acre ranch south of Austin designated for young and older special needs adults.

The group, led by Dydek and Dye, are hoping to find at least 100 acres of land locally to be used for the special needs facility. They have already received some leads, but need more people who are willing to donate land or know of available land, as well as parents with special-needs children, to network and discuss the effort.

Dydek said communities for adults with special needs are few and far between. She and other parents in the group want to follow the Marbridge model and receive guidance and help from Marbridge in setting up the open facility.

There is no question that a need exists locally, Dydek said, citing statistics showing that over 100,000 special-needs citizens between the ages of 16 and 64 live in the tri-county area.

“Where are they? Group homes? At the homes that they were born to? These numbers are staggering,” said Dydek. “We need to look for land.”

Representatives of Marbridge were on hand to give information on how their facility operates and to answer questions from concerned parents. Bob Fullbright, president of Marbridge, gave advice on what it would take for a similar community to succeed if one was to be built nearby.

“We’re very fortunate to have the staff together that we have,” Fullbright said. “It’s not about bricks and mortar. People like to give funding to that, but it’s got to start with the staff.”

Fullbright said he plans to bring a proposal to Marbridge’s board of directors on Sept. 7. Although he said he couldn’t commit to Marbridge’s building and staffing the facility, they would definitely be able to give direction for making the local project work if it becomes a reality.

The group has scheduled a second meeting to discuss plans on Oct. 4 at the Carroll Senior High Auditorium. For more information on the effort, visit [www.bridgetomarbridge.givingyousite.com](http://www.bridgetomarbridge.givingyousite.com).