

## Grantee Spotlight - Good News For Morris County One Of A Series of Hogg Foundation's Collaborative Approaches to Well-Being in Rural Communities



MARGINE MIMS & SHERRY WILLIS

*(Editor's note: By Josephine Gurch - This is one of a series spotlighting the grantees of the Hogg Foundation's Collaborative Approaches to Well-Being in Rural Communities initiative.)*

In July 2018, the Hogg Foundation awarded \$45 million across six grantees of the Communities (WRC) initiative. One grantee, Alliance For Greater Works, received funds to coordinate the initiative, and the other five ... all in rural Texas counties ... are using the funding to develop or build upon an existing collaborative to strengthen our communities.

Through this project, we seek to address the community conditions that contribute to mental health disparities and the significant inequities that exist in Texas, and leverage the power of inclusivity and shared decision-making to create and implement community-driven solutions. It's a tall order, thus, we've given each collaborative three years to assess their community's needs and assets, build new relationships, and identify strategies that lead to better mental health for everyone in their community. The grantees are in the first of these three years.

Today, we're spotlighting one of the five community collaboratives, located in Morris County.

Morris County Collaborative had its start as a community-led initiative organized by Ms. Margine Mims, a resident who continues to work tirelessly towards the betterment of her community.

Now with the fiscal support of Northeast Texas Community College, the Collaborative is bringing together local service providers, government officials and community members to restore a sense of pride and hope throughout the county.

### The Need

During World War II and shortly thereafter, a tubular steel plant operated by Lone Star Steel Company drew some 6,000 workers to Morris County. Although demographic and economic growth stagnated in the decades that followed, the small hub of households dependent on the plant would stay afloat until the late 1980's, when a plunge in oil prices and rise in competitive foreign exports triggered layoffs by the thousands. Today, the county's unemployment rate hovers around 8.6 percent-twice that of the state.

The lack of development in Morris County has been greatly felt. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) County Health Rankings, measuring for overall health outcomes across 242 Texas counties, place Morris County at 235, within the bottom five percent. Just one primary care physician in the area has services to offer-an unsustainable shortage that forces most of the 12,000 plus residents to travel either 45 miles to Longview or 80 miles to Tyler no matter the nature of the visit. Work commutes span similarly long distances for most.

This general sense of rural disconnect may explain why historically excluded minority, LGBTQ and non-religious populations struggle to make their voices heard. If times and spaces designated for coming together are scarce, the tasks of strengthening kinship and inspiring civic duty become far more formidable.

### The Vision

To address the lack of close ties between and within the communities of Morris County, the Collaborative plans on uniting medical facilities, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations and other stakeholders to develop community outreach efforts for high-risk and underrepresented individuals and groups.

"There is a rich history here," says Tammy Heinz, Hogg Foundation program officer and consumer and family liaison. "The community members are strong and proud that they've survived in spite of many challenges."

Such effective collaboration would be unprecedented-and, crucially, can't happen without the cooperation and contributions of all community members. To bring them into the fold, the Morris County Collaborative approach will use community-based participatory research, town halls and community events. Before funding from the foundation was even secured, Morris County Collaborative leaders managed to bring 130 attendees to a town hall to discuss the program's priorities-a meeting that resulted in a complete revision of their budget based on feedback.

"Our doors are open," writes Beverly Austin, who handles the Collaborative's public relations. "We have a lot to look forward together, and we need everyone's perspective!"



**Vote**  
SATURDAY, MAY 4  
IN THE  
NAPLES  
CITY ELECTION  
FOR  
DAVID BETTS  
FOR  
MAYOR  
(Political Ad Paid For By David Betts 501 W. L. Doc Dodson Blvd. Naples, Texas 75568)

To The Citizens Of Naples:  
My name is David Betts. I was born in Naples in 1951 and have lived here and raised my family here since that time.  
I am the son of the late Alice and Doysse W. (Red) Betts and I am married to Donna Betts, the daughter of the late Melba and Curtis Hammonds. We are the parents of three sons, Shane, Cody and Andrew.  
On Saturday, May 4th, I am asking for your vote for me as your Mayor of Naples.  
I attended Paul H. Pewitt Schools and earned my high school diploma here.  
I have been an active member of the Naples Fire Department for more than 50 years, currently serving as one of two Assistant Fire Chiefs for the department.  
I have also served as a volunteer Reserve Police Officer for the City of Naples for many years. I received my certification from the Police Academy at Kilgore College.  
I am proud of my hometown and I would like to continue that public service as your Mayor.  
I retired from Red River Army Depot after 40 years of services.  
During the last 11 years at RRAD, I was in a position of upper management, and was a Deputy

Director of Maintenance for the last four years of my service.  
As Deputy Director, there were 10 divisions and well over 2,000 government and contract personnel in my directory.  
My experience includes, but is not limited to dealing with contracts, writing proposals for additional workload, working with the Unions to resolve disputes and to build a strong partnership between the Unions and Management.  
It was my job to meet consistently with the Facility Division to make sure maintenance projects stayed on track, and to identify additional projects for the coming year.  
My greatest strength lies in developing plans to solve problems.  
As your Mayor, I will work diligently with your City Council to make sure the members know every detail (good or bad) so they can make an informed decision concerning the growth of our city.  
If you elect me to serve as the Mayor of Naples, I will do all in my power to meet with your expectations in filling the job as the leader of your city government.  
Thank you,  
David Betts

WEAK OR NO SIGNAL

# DISAPPEARING CHANNELS?

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