

PAXTON — The Ford-Iroquois Public Health Department is forming a non-profit foundation to raise funds to be used to help people in Ford and Iroquois counties with health-related expenses they otherwise could not afford.

“We run across lots and lots and lots of people with financial hardship — say moms, for example, who have kids and are not ready (financially) for parenting and are not able to take their children to the doctor and buy diapers. ... Or older adults without insurance who need a procedure,” said Doug Corbett, administrator of the health department. “We want to help those individuals, and the foundation will allow us to raise funds that can be passed onto those individuals to offset their costs.”

The health department plans to apply to have the Ford-Iroquois Public Health Foundation approved for nonprofit 501C(3) status “within the next two to four months,” Corbett said. To be a registered 501C(3) organization, the foundation must first file paperwork with the Iroquois County recorder of deeds, file federal and state tax exemption registration and register the organization with the Illinois attorney general’s office.

The volunteer-run foundation has already elected its board of officers and bylaws, Corbett said — another step necessary to apply as a nonprofit foundation. An initial meeting of the board was held Oct. 17.

Once officially created, the foundation would be able to accept tax-deductible donations from businesses and citizens to be used toward helping the needy cover medical expenses. With the nonprofit 501(C)3 status, the foundation will be able to apply for grants, as well.

Corbett hopes the foundation will be officially created by next spring. In the meantime, the health department can still acquire donations but must set them aside until the foundation gains its nonprofit status. Anyone interested in donating now can contact Corbett at the health department office in Watseka.

Eventually, Corbett said, “we’ll contact individuals through press releases, through community civic organizations, newsletters, church bulletins. And then we’ll probably be contacting businesses directly for donations.

“The nice thing is once everything’s approved, that (nonprofit) status means businesses (or individuals) can legally take (money that is donated) off their taxes,” Corbett said. People will be able to donate in a number of ways, including through their wills, according to Paxton Mayor Bill Ingold, one of seven members of the foundation board. Ingold, a former board member for the now-closed Paxton Community Hospital, said he thinks the foundation will be a great benefit to a lot of people.

“I think with the economy now, people are needing some help and we need to have a way for those people to obtain some help in medical instances,”

Ingold said. “And if people are wanting to leave a bequest or a gift or whatever and mention somebody in their will, that would be a good thing to think about.”

The board is chaired by Dr. Richard Stanton, who ran the Iroquois Mental Health Center in Watseka prior to his retirement. Other members include Ingold; Don Deany of Watseka; Treasurer Brittany Cluver of Watseka; Julie Steinman of Gibson City; Marty Bramstett of Watseka; and Dena Longest of Watseka.

The foundation's board will meet regularly to discuss how donations received should be used. The board will make decisions based upon the recommendations of a three-member advisory committee.

"The advisory committee will let Dr. Stanton, who's the chairperson, what types of things the health department's seen that they'd like to be considered as projects," Corbett said, "and those would then be discussed by the full board and voted on."

One goal already discussed is creating a "Baby Bucks" program that would benefit teenaged parents or those without many financial resources. The program would provide gift certificates for diapers and baby food, for example, as a reward for parents doing "certain things" to qualify.

"It's like an incentive thing to go see the doctor, to get babies vaccinated, to eat healthy food, for breast feeding," Corbett explained.

"For all these different things, if the parent would do that, they would be issued 'Baby Bucks,' and they could take those Baby Bucks to wherever in Ford or Iroquois counties and redeem them for things they need for their children."

Corbett said that ever since he began working as administrator of the health department, he has been looking into setting up a nonprofit foundation. He noted that the department had been receiving a grant to cover some of the goals of the to-be-created foundation but that the funding was suddenly cut off when the donor realized the department did not have the required 501(C)3 status.

"Then when I started doing research, we came to find out that we cannot be given that status from the government because we're a local government entity," Corbett said. "So the only way to do it was to set up a completely separate foundation that has its own governing board and set that up as a 501(C)3."

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