

Harts women tell stories through pictures

by MARTHA SPARKS, Society Editor

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The Harts Photovoice participants show their favorite photostories. Pictured are, from left, back row, Karen Hartman, Anita Frye, Sara Butcher, Kay Tomblin, P.J. Watts, Crystal Carter, and front row, Lori Mitchell, Shannon Bell (project director), and Renae Thompson.

HARTS — Since September, seven Harts area women and one youth member have been taking pictures to tell the story of their community. This story includes the positive and beautiful aspects of the community, as well as the problems and concerns in the area. The Photovoice women held an exhibit and gave a presentation Tuesday, April 21, at Chapmanville Middle School to show their work and discuss their ideas for change in the community.

Participants in the project include Crystal Carter, Anita Frye, Karen Hartman, Lori Mitchell, Renae Thompson, Kay Tomblin, P.J. Watts, and youth member Sara Butcher. The exhibit displayed 62 “photostories” (photographs with a written narrative) that the women created. Project director Shannon Bell expressed how inspired she is by the women involved in this project.

“The Harts community has a lot of beauty and residents have a lot to be proud of,” Bell said. “The Photovoice women did a wonderful job capturing what is special about their community

and telling the story of their concerns.”

A number of the photographs depicted beautiful mountain scenes, sunsets, flowers, wildlife, and other images of nature. Others focused on what is unique about the Harts community, such as the importance of farming to the community, the value of church, and the close ties of family. One photostory, created jointly by Anita Frye and Karen Hartman, shows a photograph of the Harts community from a hill above the town and states, “This is Harts, West Virginia. Our town, my town. It’s a small town, and everybody knows everybody. Some big city ways are creeping in, but we still have small town values. Hopefully we will find the right balance for us.”



This photostory created by Lori Mitchell, is of her great-grandfather Poppy Will’s house, which is more than 100 years old and is located in both Lincoln and Logan Counties.

Another photostory, created by Lori Mitchell, is of her great-grandfather Poppy Will’s house, which is more than 100 years old and is located in both Lincoln and Logan Counties.

“Poppy Will used to joke that he would wake up in one county and eat breakfast in another,” Mitchell said.

Other strengths that the women depicted in their photostories included the Harts Health Party, the strong tradition of coon hunting in the area, and the Lincoln County Crimewatch.

A number of the photostories dealing with the problems and concerns in the area focused on certain dangerous areas along the roadways, such as a cracking rock cliff overhang at Toney’s Curve along Route 10.

“This rock is cracking and looks like it might fall at any time. The rock cliff hangs over the road, and if it were to fall while someone was driving by, they would be killed,” said Crystal Carter, who gave a copy of her photostory to Delegate Ralph Rodighiero at the exhibit on Tuesday evening. “I drive by this every day, and it scares me to death. I watch it every day, just wondering when it is going to fall.”

A number of the women took photographs and wrote photostories about trash dumping. P.J. Watts’ photograph of a trash dump along Sand Creek Road states, “This picture is an example of what most holler sides in Harts look like. It’s very sad to see. Most people don’t care. But I’d like to see the community come together and do something about it.”

Frye, Carter, Watts, and Hartman all took photographs of roadside litter and wrote photostories about their belief that a bottle deposit in West Virginia would mean a decrease in the amount of litter in their community.

“In almost every place along the roads where I see litter, bottles and cans make up the majority of the trash,” said Frye in her photostory.

Hartman, who took photographs of plastic and glass bottles lining the road in front of her driveway, expressed her belief that a five or ten cent deposit on bottles would mean that people would be less likely to throw their beverage containers out the car window, and even if people did throw their bottles out, other residents or civic groups “would come collect these bottles and recycle them for cash.” She also reported that in California, where she used to live, the state’s bottle deposit program “now pays for itself, even the jobs in the redemption centers. In California they actually have a ‘problem’ with people stealing bottles and cans out of the recycling bins to turn in for the deposit. Wouldn’t it be nice if that were our ‘problem’ too? That is a much better problem to have than what we have now – roadsides lined with bottles.”

Some of the Photovoice women, such as Renae Thompson and Kay Tomblin, told stories of companies’ irresponsible practices destroying their property. Thompson’s photostory, titled “Overspraying,” shows her family’s fruit orchard beside Route 10. In her photostory, Thompson describes her concern about the chemicals that the state sprays beside the roads to kill weeds — “Our grape, raspberry, and blackberry vines and two apple trees were killed last summer due to spraying of chemicals. What kind of chemicals are they using? What kind of long-term effects will they have on the people who live near the roads that are sprayed? What are they doing to the water supply?”

Tomblin took photographs of a “mine blowout” on her property, where orange mud and water flooded down her hillside. “This is the aftermath of highwall mining when coal companies come too close to the other side of the mountain,” Tomblin states. “When the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) fails to make the coal companies liable to the landowners on the other side of the mountain from where they are mining, things like this can happen and affect the private owners.”

In their public presentation, the Photovoice women also described some of the project ideas that they would like help from the community to make happen. Their first idea was a Harts Litter Clean-Up Campaign, which includes four components: (1) A trash clean-up contest with prizes for the people in the community who pick up the most bags of trash; (2) Writing, calling, and visiting elected officials to try to get a bottle deposit law passed in West Virginia; (3) Educating the community about trash and recycling options in the area; and (4) Trying to get cameras installed to catch people who dump trash in popular dumping spots.

The second idea the women shared was to start a road and bridge improvement campaign to contact the West Virginia State Road Department, Harts area legislators, and the Lincoln County Commissioners to try to get dangerous places on the roadways fixed, such as the rock cliff overhang at Toney’s curve.

The Photovoice women’s third project idea is to try to organize more events to bring the community together. They talked about what a special event the Harts Health Fair is in the community, and they would like to see more community events organized to promote

togetherness and pride in the Harts community.

Their final project idea was to try to identify places for parks and playgrounds in the area. One idea was to try to raise money to turn the playground at the Ferrellsburg Community Center into a community park with updated playground equipment.

The Photovoice women would like to find future venues to display their photostories in and around the Harts community. Also, they are seeking other people from the community who are willing to help them with their project ideas. If you would like to contact the Photovoice women, either to schedule a showing of the exhibit or to help with one of their project ideas, please contact project director Shannon Bell by email at WVPhotovoice@gmail.com or by phone at (304) 610-8318, and she will put you in contact with the women.

An online gallery of the Harts women's photostories will soon be on the web at www.WVPhotovoice.org.

This project is part of the Southern West Virginia Photovoice Project, which is taking place in five communities throughout Southern West Virginia. This project was made possible through the support of Cabin Creek Health Systems, West Virginia Development Office, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, University of Oregon Sociology Department, and Photographic Production Services.