

# idea corner

## Kansas Family Forum

Kansas was chosen as the first place for the national hearings for the White House Conference on Families. We believe this was because of Kansas home economists' creative work mobilizing grass-roots interest in each of our 105 counties.

When James Guy Tucker, chairman of the White House conference, came to Kansas State University in June, 1979, to give the keynote address for our Family Conference climaxing our 2-year Kansas Forum on Families, he said that the leadership of home economists in Kansas already had served as a model for other professions. We appreciated his kind words. But even more, we were gratified at our success in involving home economists in our residential staff and home economists in Extension in a joint venture of advocacy and education.

Early in 1977, the dean of the College of Home Economics and the assistant director of Cooperative Extension for Quality of Living looked for a way home economics could provide leadership for the public and private sectors' input into the future White House conference. The plan for the Kansas Forum on Families resulted.

Residential faculty provided the research and scholarship base; Extension was the natural avenue for organization. Task force committees

worked on the separate parts. It was exciting to dream; it was difficult to communicate that dream. Home economists learned to work in new ways with professional and private people in all levels.

The first step was to share the dream with top administrators and establish the framework for the two-year program. President Duane Acker of Kansas State University signed letters of invitation to leaders of public and private organizations. The governor of Kansas proclaimed 1978 "The Year of the Family." Over 100 agencies responded with interest. An informational meeting was arranged in the state capitol; 39 agency heads and leaders of state organizations attended.

A research task force prepared a 225-page sourcebook for the discussions being planned in the individual counties. An Extension and college committee prepared a slide-tape set to identify dimensions of family knowledge and issues of contemporary concern. State training meetings oriented Extension home economists to materials and procedures for helping their counties study the status of their families.

In early 1978, 11 area forums were held throughout the state with the dean and assistant director highlighting each of these "kickoff" meetings. The locations were determined by the county Extension faculty.

Each of these area forums included representatives from 10 surrounding counties. Eight to 10 representatives from each county were selected by the county Extension home economist. County representatives included ministers, agency heads, school personnel, law enforcement representatives, Extension committee members and board chairmen, and health-related professionals, among others.

Interest was high after the area meetings and some counties began their community forums immediately. In other counties, preparations were more gradual and included activities such as preliminary visits by committee members to community organizations and agencies. The range of ideas and county involvement went far beyond what originally had been thought possible. In June, 1979, the forum climaxed with 500 people in a 2-day state conference to discuss county reports and their own views of family status in Kansas.

It was exciting to see the coordination of professional and lay input in problem solving brought together under the leadership of home economics and Extension. We believe that this leadership role is the province of home economics whenever communities are concerned with families. We have profited from our preparation for and our experience with the Kansas forum and will be happy to share our insights with others.

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