

Program turns workers into 'developmental managers'

By Michele Linck

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SOUTH SIOUX CITY — A group of city employees has come up with a number of ideas for improving the way they do their work and the way the city does its business; ideas which could gross an estimated savings of \$2.6 million over the typical five-year "lifespan" of most improvements, if implemented.

The City Council received the report Monday detailing its own workers' ideas which arose through participation in a Measurable Management project implemented by Williams & Co. of Sioux City. The program cost the city \$20,400.

The city contracted with Williams last February and the company has since led the employees through training Williams vice president Dennis Bixenman said is designed to make them "developmental managers," always looking for ways to improve the process, vs. "maintenance-and-survivor" managers.

"They're taught to evaluate and implement ideas, then come back to the group with improvements," Bixenman explained to the council. The program targeted four key areas: increasing revenue, reducing

costs, enhancing economic development and increasing citizen satisfaction.

Together, he said, the group came up with 34 ideas for improvements, each linkable to at least one of the four key targets.

Among the participants were the police chief, clerk, economic development specialist, library director, communications coordinator, finance clerk, public works director, parks director, water and sewer foreman and chief code officer.

Asked if he had found a way to reduce police overtime, Bixenman said he had not. He stressed that the Measured Management program does not impose ideas, but teaches those who know their work best to constantly be thinking of ways to improve, then implement them.

Among those ideas coming from the program was one from Police Chief Scot Ford: deliver case files to the County Attorney's office electronically instead of physically. Benefits: enhanced delivery time, reduced copy costs and staff time saved. Implementation cost: \$1,970. Savings: about \$13,000 annually.

Sue Petersen, who keeps the city's books, suggested implementing a new credit and collections policy for the utilities department's bad debts. The benefit: reduced charge-offs, better collection. Savings:

about \$120,000 a year.

Other ideas offered "immeasurable" savings, but still were considered to be of merit. Parks and Recreation director Jack Wardell suggested developing a system in which all city camp sites are reserved over the city computer system using existing software. Benefit: more convenience for citizens and potential for increased revenues.

South Sioux City was the first municipality in the continental United States to employ the Measured Management program, which was developed in England and is widely used in corporations, Bixenman said.

Williams and Co. consulting president Harlan Crouch presented a certificate to Mayor Bill McLarty. "We were pleased, but not surprised South Sioux City decided to undertake this program," he said. "We were well aware of your reputation for innovation."

Bixenman said two other cities will likely implement the program early next year. He said they have been waiting to see how it turned out for South Sioux City.

"This by no means is over," Lance Hedquist, city administrator, said. "We'll continue to work to find ways to improve processes within the city."