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JCC hosts Community Conversation

BY BRIANNA SADLER, Staff writer

STEUBENVILLE - Jefferson Community College, along with Trinity Health System and the Jefferson County Educational Service Center, hosted a Community Conversation on Oct. 28 on the topic of college readiness.

A crowd of about 140 participants comprised of high school students from across the county, JCC alumni, high school and college administration and members of the general public came together to offer ideas about how to better prepare students for college.

JCC enlisted the help of the New York-based, nonprofit organization **Public Agenda**, which comprised a list of questions for discussion in its Choicework program.

"Our work is about helping leaders and citizens get together to have productive, problem-solving dialogue," said Lara Birnback, public agenda senior project director. "Tonight's dialogue happens to be about college readiness."

Birnback noted she helped the college in 2006 with its first Community Conversation about how to help students be more successful in college but the topic for Tuesday's discussion was the first the company had initiated.

"This is the very first time they have pioneered college readiness," Birnback said. "They've done some testing on this, but this is the first roll out."

Birnback explained the Choicework programs works by breaking up the participants into six groups. Then the participants take turns answering the questions in the Choicework program and offering ideas.

"First and foremost, part of it is the importance of bringing diverse people together to have a conversation with different perspectives," Birnback said.

"Having a civil conversation can be very invigorating for a community."

The groups were brought back together at the end of their

individual conversations to discuss ideas with everyone.

Birnback noted that such Community Conversations yield different results based on what actions the participants choose to take. Each participant will receive a summary report of the conversation from JCC.

"Our hope is that people will get more involved," Birnback said. JCC President Laura Meeks noted the importance of higher education should be stressed at all levels of the education process.

"We have a great desire to help our students succeed," Meeks said. "We're very honored to live in a community that puts stress on education. The goal is to raise education attainment. The horizon for going to college is changing in the state of Ohio. It's important to have discussions about students going to college."

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