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COMMUNITY FOUNDATION RELEASES *VITAL SIGNS*, A REPORT ON OUR COMMUNITY'S QUALITY OF LIFE

MEDICINE HAT (October 6th, 2009) – The Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta today released its 2009 *Vital Signs* report. It is the third straight year for the report.

The reader-friendly report card tracks and grades Medicine Hat's quality of life in key areas such as the gap between rich and poor, health, housing, and the environment – transforming local facts and figures into 'research you can read on the bus.'

"*Vital Signs* challenges the board of the Community Foundation, our donors, our grant recipients and the community-at-large, to consider what actions we can take to improve our overall quality of life; not only for ourselves, but for everyone living in Medicine Hat," said Shann Snedden, chair of the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta. "This report creates the basis for further discussion and as a catalyst for further action. It guides us at the foundation and -- we hope -- inspires others in our community."

The report finds that Hatters express a strong sense of belonging and are very active in arts, cultural and recreational activities including participating in a large number of charity walks and events.

The downturn of the economy has definitely affected Medicine Hat. Large increases in the number claiming Employment Insurance were matched by large decreases in drilling rig activity; increased use of the food bank is also noted in the report.

Canada's sunniest city continues to grow with the

Medicine Hat's Vital Signs 2009 - Highlights

- Hatters have a very strong sense of community and participate in large numbers for charity walks and events.
- The number of people who have not completed high school are among the highest rates in the country.
- This area is a good place to start a family. There are more weddings per capita in Medicine Hat than most other places in Canada and the proportion of low birth weights is below both national and provincial averages.
- Access to recycling is good and the amount being recycled is up but so is the amount of waste placed in the landfill.
- The downturn of the economy has hit hard particularly for the oil and gas industry and has resulted in sharp increase in those claiming Employment Insurance.
- Average family income increased by 34.1% between 2001 and 2006, which sounds good, but the provincial average was 35.8%!
- In 2008 increasing numbers of Hatters (14.5%, up from 12.8% in 2003) reported not having a family doctor.
- While rental vacancy rates increased (4.3% in spring 2009) there is also a sharp increase in numbers of people on the wait list for social housing.

2009 Municipal Census reporting over 61,000 residents. In 2006 the average family income in Medicine Hat (\$88,140) exceeded the national average (\$82,390). However, Hatters still have some way to go to catch up to the provincial average of \$105,953 in 2006.

“Vital Signs reports that Medicine Hat has a slightly higher rate of marriage than other Alberta communities,” said Community Foundation executive director Mike Christie. “An increase in the number of births, along with a below average proportion of low birth weight babies, supports the contention that Medicine Hat is good place to bring up a family. The only concern is the growing number of people who do not have a family doctor.”

Hatters lack of access to family doctors has been previously reported in Vital Signs, and Christie believes it is a significant trend to follow.

“This is one of the strengths of this kind of annual report,” he said. “It is important to track changes and trends in keys areas of our quality of life.”

Les Erickson, Community Foundation board member and chair of the Vital Signs Steering Committee, said that Vital Signs serves as a learning tool and valuable resource for community members.

“This is a report that portrays the quality of our lives in and around Medicine Hat and evokes conversations,” he said. “Perhaps some people who read this report will dig a little deeper into those aspects of our quality of life that interest them the most. In that way, Vital Signs can be very useful research tool.”

Vital Signs

Medicine Hat's Vital Signs[®] 2009 collates data from various sources at the national, provincial and particularly the local level. The report provides an overview and makes connections between key quality of life issues in our community. It is designed to share important existing research in a reader-friendly way that is accessible to everyone. *Vital Signs* also includes ratings from local citizens who assisted by grading the indicators.

Medicine Hat's Vital Signs[®] 2009 is part of a growing nation-wide initiative by Canadian community foundations to measure quality of life and take action to improve it. Today, 16 local *Vital Signs* report cards are being released by Community Foundations across Canada.

Community Foundations in the following cities and regions are participating in Vital Signs 2009:

- Victoria, BC
- Central Okanagan, BC* (includes Kelowna and area)
- Sunshine Coast, BC*
- Boundary Communities, BC* (includes Christina Lake, Grand Forks, Greenwood, Midway, Rock Creek., Bridesville, Beaverdell)
- Calgary, AB
- Medicine Hat, AB
- Red Deer, AB
- Kingston & Area, ON*
- Ottawa, ON

- Toronto, ON
- Oakville, ON
- Guelph & Wellington, ON
- Waterloo Region, ON (includes Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge)
- Greater Sudbury, ON
- Wolfville, NS*
- Greater Saint John, NB

*(*denotes a community releasing its first Vital Signs report)*

Vital Activity

Vital Activity is the “so what” of Vital Signs. It will provide advice and pointers about the questions raised by Vital Signs. Questions like "So what's next?" or "What can I do?" and "How can the Community Foundation contribute?" Throughout Vital Signs 2009 there are suggested Vital Activities that everyone can undertake.

Vital Activity is featured in a number of Community Foundation publications and profiles people, programs and projects that enhance the quality of life in Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta.

“Vital Activity demonstrates the very valuable contribution that organizations, governments and individuals make for the well being of our community,” said Christie. “Vital activities are like the pieces of a jigsaw; when combined, the whole picture makes sense. Our job, with the help of our supporters and donors, is to make sure there are no important pieces of the picture missing.”

About Community Foundations

Community Foundations build and manage permanent endowments to support local priorities. The foundations use their deep knowledge of their communities' needs to connect donors to the causes and organizations that matter most to them, helping their donors make a lasting difference.

With more than \$2.9-billion in assets, the Community Foundation movement is one of Canada's largest grant-makers, providing more than \$176-million in grants last year to thousands of charities.

Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta

The local community foundation covers the entire Southeastern region of Alberta and was founded in 1992. Over the past 17 years assets have grown to just over \$6 million. The foundation operates a comprehensive grant making program that has resulted in over \$2.5 million in charitable grants to a wide range of local charities. Funding requests from local agencies always heavily outweigh the available funds. The Community Foundation strongly encourages the support of caring local citizens to help build permanent endowments to keep pace with the needs of our rapidly changing communities.

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Note to editors/producers: All 16 *Vital Signs* reports, and media contacts for participating community foundations, can be found at www.vitalsignscanada.ca. An expanded and linked version of Medicine Hat's Vital Signs® can be found at www.medicinehatvitalsigns.ca.