

LION program aims to instill neighborhood pride, success in Live Oak

By KIMBERLY WHITE

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LIVE OAK -- While meeting with community members in the neighborhoods that make up Live Oak, Steven Weiss is also serving as what he calls a "talent scout."

Weiss is the new project manager for a pilot program, Leadership in our Neighborhoods, or LION. The program is being run through the Community Bridges/Live Oak Family Resource Center with an \$85,000 grant from the county's Redevelopment Agency.

The goal of the year-long program is to get residents in the unincorporated community actively involved in identifying problems in their neighborhoods, then working through a network of agencies -- including the Sheriff's Office and the county's planning and parks departments -- to create tangible solutions.

Weiss, whose position is funded through the redevelopment agency grant, has spent the month meeting with "empowered and impassioned community members who are on board with making positive changes," and will be introduced to residents noon-1:30 p.m. Wednesday at the resource center.

Between now and early March, when LION officially starts, Weiss will continue meeting with representatives from area churches, schools and individuals to identify which areas have the most pressing needs. During those meetings, he'll also be on the lookout for residents with leadership qualities who can help lead the charge.

Weiss and Elizabeth Schilling, the Community Bridges/Live Oak Family Resource Center's executive director, have divided Live Oak into 19 neighborhoods. Eventually, three will be targeted for improvement projects. By early March, leaders in those areas will begin hosting meetings and events to get input from their neighbors on what kinds of changes they'd like to see, Weiss said.

For example, a sense of community cohesiveness could be created or enhanced with a community garden, and street signage could be improved in other areas for greater pedestrian and motorist safety.

Those leaders will relay those concerns to him, and he and Schilling will then meet with officials with the Sheriff's Office, Department of Public Works and other county agencies to get those projects off the ground. An intern from UC Santa Cruz will help Weiss implement those projects, all of which will be funded by an additional \$10,000 redevelopment grant.

Supervisor John Leopold, whose district includes Live Oak, believes the LION program will be successful and that its success could be

replicated in other areas. Though funds to expand the project are jeopardized under Gov. Jerry Brown's proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies, Leopold said funding from public- and private-sector sources could provide other revenue streams.

"People like to support that which works well," he added, and the program will result in stronger neighborhoods with greater communication between residents and county officials.

Karen Mallory, a Live Oak resident who'd been volunteering at the resource center for the last two years, also said she sees great potential for LION and hopes to be involved as a leader.

"I think what's really exciting is it gives us a chance to talk to people who rarely have any say on what improvements are made in their neighborhoods," she added. "What I'm really excited about is that the redevelopment agency is investing in a program that listens to people, that encourages our community members to say what's really important to them."

IF YOU GO

LEADERSHIP IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

WHAT: Meet-and-greet with project manager Steven Weiss

WHEN: Noon-1:30 p.m. Wednesday

WHERE: Live Oak Family Resource Center, 1438 Capitola Road, Live Oak

INFORMATION: 476-7284 ext. 108



Steven Weiss heads new Live Oak Family Resource Center program to get community members involved in their neighborhoods. (Dan Coyro/Sentinel)