

Volunteer work connects community, center

BY CATHARIN SHEPARD
Staff writer

The city of Raeford is working with a local center to help people with disabilities become more involved in their community, City Manager Dennis Baxley said.

A group of clients with Monarch Services, formerly Vocational Options of Hoke County, joined forces to help the city produce its most recent newsletter. In the process, it gave the clients a chance to be more active and connect with others, Monarch center leader Bruce Hurst said.

"It gives them the chance to do some volunteer work. We're trying to get the persons with developmental disabilities and intellectual disabilities out in the community, to tell the community, these persons want to be a contributing member of the community," Hurst said.

The Monarch organization provides services for about 32,000 people who have intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, substance abuse or mental

health issues.

A big change came earlier this year as the center started working to incorporate the arts into its programs and began seeking out ways to help their clients express themselves creatively.

"It's another model to help persons with intellectual disabilities to bring out creativity. Some of that has been through paper mâché, painting and stitching," Hurst said.

The local branch of the program had a meeting with local leaders this summer to talk about how they can help support those efforts. When Baxley attended the meeting to represent the city, he had the idea of having the Monarch clients work with the local newsletter. The clients helped put together the city newsletter that went out to about 1,600 residents, Baxley said.

"There were smiles, they were happy, friendly. They had the staff smiling, they worked hard," he said.

Now, the city manager is helping find more opportunities for the clients to get out in the commu-

nity. They had also volunteered to help with a fish fry that the county Parks and Recreation Department hosted last week, Baxley said.

"There's a lot to be done in the county that these guys can help with," he said.

The city manager has been "wonderful" in working with the center to find ways for Monarch's clients to participate in the community, Hurst said. The outreach is good for both the community and the clients, and the clients loved the chance to work with the city, Hurst said.

"They came back so excited about being in downtown Raeford and working and helping out," he said.

The city is also coordinating with Hurst and local attorney Gina Southerland to put together an art show to display the Monarch clients' artwork. The show is set for October 22 at 6 p.m.

The center is also looking for more volunteer opportunities for clients. For more information, contact Monarch at 875-6639.

