

Proudly DeKalb seeks to foster local pride

America's Best Communities just one aspect

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DeKALB – Proudly DeKalb is a new group working to foster hometown pride in the community.

The group formed earlier this year and is currently working with the city, Northern Illinois University and other community partners toward winning [Frontier Communication's Americas Best Communities grant](#).

DeKalb is one of three Illinois towns to achieve quarterfinalist status in the competition, which has a grand prize of \$3 million. Second- and third-place winners receive \$2 million and \$1 million, respectively. A total of [50 towns nationwide](#) were chosen as quarterfinalists. Just for advancing this far, [the city received a \\$35,000 grant from Frontier](#) and expects another \$15,000 from its mentor organization, ESPN.

The money would be used toward transformative projects and programs that move the city toward its identified goals, Frank Roberts, president of Re:New DeKalb, one of the organizations behind Proudly DeKalb, said.

The application deadline for the semifinals is Nov. 6. It's "all hands on deck," Roberts said, with representatives from the local business community, the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, DeKalb Park District, the city and School District 428 behind the effort.

"We have an overall group of people overseeing the process," he said. "But we have different subcommittees focusing on different aspects. The communications piece is growing in its size, scope and impact."

Communications so far involves the hashtag #ProudlyDeKalb that businesses can and other community organizations can use. Proudly DeKalb also has its own [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

The website www.proudlydekalb.com features links to local organizations within the community including the Ellwood House Museum, the Glidden Homestead, the Egyptian Theatre, KishHealth System and more. Information about the America's Best Community competition is available on the site as well.

Brett Brown, a local attorney and co-chair of the Proudly DeKalb communications committee, said that the digital efforts are a way to get a positive message out.

“Long term, the Proudly DeKalb effort wants to change the nature of the dialogue we seem to have in our community,” Brown said. “Today, it feels like a conversation ... is revitalization versus preservation. From a Proudly DeKalb standpoint, it ought to be, let’s work to stay relevant and current, but respect our history.”

While winning the America’s Best Communities grant is the group’s primary focus at the moment, Proudly DeKalb will continue long after the competition plays out, Brown said.

Debbie Armstrong, executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the effort already is making great progress.

“We are soliciting stories from residents on how people are proud of DeKalb,” she said. “We want people to post those stories to the website and share them. Ultimately, this is good for everyone. It helps foster pride locally and gets the word out to people outside our community as well.”