



For Immediate Release

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Jefferson Regional Foundation Announces Initiative to Reach 1,000 Residents through 100 Mealtime Conversations in 1 Week

JEFFERSON HILLS, Pa. (October 1, 2018) – A new initiative sponsored by the Jefferson Regional Foundation and Jefferson Community Collaborative aims to bring together 1,000 people at a series of 100 mealtime conversations over a 1-week period. Around the Table South, which will take place from October 15-19, is designed to make connections, share ideas, and inspire action by people who live and work in the South Hills and Mon Valley communities.

Site hosts will invite ten guests to breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and during the meal will guide thought-provoking table conversations. Topics will include questions such as, “How can we work together to make a stronger and healthier community?” The Jefferson Regional Foundation will then collect and publish the results of the table discussions in a Conversations from the Community Report to share insights, information, and inspiration in early 2019.

The new Superintendent of the South Allegheny School District, Dr. Lisa Duval, is a lifelong resident, graduate and parent in the District, which includes Glassport, Liberty, Lincoln, and Port Vue. Dr. Duval is serving as a host for Around the Table South, “because it is important, and I like the idea of multiple stakeholders in our community sitting down and having a conversation—it is something that doesn’t happen nearly enough,” she said. “This provides me the opportunity to bring people to the table and discuss current things going on with our school district and community.”

Mary Phan-Gruber, Executive Director of the Jefferson Regional Foundation, is pleased by the overwhelming response to this effort.

“We already have more than 90 tables committed and we are confident we will have more hosts come forward to reach our goal of 100 tables across the area,” she said. “A good conversation, like a good

meal, is inspiring. We are taking this simple idea, listening across the community, and – most importantly – sharing the themes and ideas that emerge from the tables. Our tagline for Around the Table South is *Conversations that Build Community!*”

This community engagement approach was developed in 2014 by the Chicago Community Trust as a program called *On the Table*. In Chicago, it now attracts thousands of participants for its one-day annual event and the concept has spread to 30 other cities. This is the first replication of the model in the Pittsburgh area.

“This is a unique way to tap into the community,” noted Paula Kelly, Director of the Whitehall Public Library and an active leader in the Jefferson Community Collaborative. One of eight local libraries that have committed to host tables for this project, Ms. Kelly immediately saw Around the Table as a chance to launch the library’s strategic planning process.

“Around the Table South is a creative approach I can use to bring together a group of people to talk about the community,” she said. “I’m inviting people to the table who represent varied needs and use the library in different ways—people of various ages, perspectives, and backgrounds.”

Some table hosts are using the opportunity to bring together a targeted group of residents. Donna Canovali, the Sales Director at Atria’s Senior Living South Hills, is inviting a group of adult caregivers with aging parents to have a conversation at the table about their issues and ideas. She anticipates the discussion at her table “might range from supporting active aging to quality of life to long-term care options in our communities.”

James Graham, the Board Chair of the Jefferson Regional Foundation, believes Around the Table South is a perfect fit for the foundation.

“The big issues we address won’t be solved by dollars alone, but by people who care about their community,” he said. “We believe that coming together around a table will help people connect with others who are interested, build their understanding of community issues, develop new ideas, and inspire participants to continue being engaged in their communities. This work is an extension of our focus on convening, building the capacity of the community, and sharing information. We have an ideal partner in this effort through the Jefferson Community Collaborative, which is a dynamic membership network of 82 community-based organizations focused on the South Hills and Mon Valley.”

Around the Table South will kick off with a host orientation and celebration event Tuesday, October 2 to help table hosts prepare for their roles, meet dozens of other community members serving as hosts, and receive toolkits. Included in the toolkit will be a 3rd Edition of the *Jefferson Community Directory*, a 140-page resource guide developed with the Jefferson Community Collaborative that is distributed to key stakeholders throughout the area to help connect residents to important resources.

Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald is also scheduled to attend the host orientation.

After the conversations, both hosts and their guests will be encouraged to complete brief surveys to share the results and their own perspective in order to identify themes and ideas across the entire community.

Pastor Floyd Hughes, who leads Crossroads Community Church in Jefferson Hills, is hosting a group of pastors for a conversation and hopes some will be inspired to serve as hosts in the future. Additionally, several members of his congregation have now reached out to fill several tables themselves. They join several other key local organizations, such as CCAC South, SHIM, Human Services Center Corp., and Jefferson Hospital, that are hosting multiple tables.

“Our congregation is made up of people from surrounding communities, so they see this as an opportunity to bring communities together, unite in helping to voice and address issues in the community, and hopefully be a part of resolving issues that impact all of our communities,” Rev. Hughes said. “The overarching theme I have heard is the unity that the table talks bring to the communities. Our congregation also asked me to express thanks to the Jefferson Regional Foundation for this huge undertaking.”

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About the Jefferson Regional Foundation

In March of 2018 Jefferson Regional Foundation celebrated five years as a local grantmaking organization focused on health and wellness for communities in the South Hills and lower Mon Valley. The Foundation has distributed nearly \$9 million in grant awards supporting 73 organizations for programs in its target area. The Jefferson Regional Foundation was funded with \$75 million for community grantmaking as part of the agreement with Highmark Inc. when Jefferson Hospital affiliated with Allegheny Health Network in 2013. The Foundation focuses on three priorities: increasing health access and prevention, improving child and family outcomes, and strengthening vulnerable populations and communities. Recognizing a commitment to convening and sharing community information, the Foundation also sponsors an annual daylong learning event for 250 participants called the Jefferson Forum, hosts the Jefferson Community Collaborative, and publishes the *Jefferson Community Directory*, a 140-page resource guide, now in its 3rd edition, which is distributed to key stakeholders throughout the area to help connect residents to important resources.

About the Jefferson Community Collaborative

The Collaborative is a membership network of 82 community-serving organizations which operates through quarterly meetings and in ongoing action teams to serve as an incubator for ideas and practices, improve the capacity of its agencies, and facilitate group action for the South Hills and Mon Valley area. The Jefferson Community Collaborative is led by a 13-member Vision Council of key community leaders and includes human services agencies, libraries, churches, child & youth programs, community development, environmental and a variety of other organizations. Its current areas of focus include behavioral health, workforce development and family and resident engagement. Action teams focus on health engagement, community engagement, Mental Health First Aid and a peer learning circle called Eat N Educate. The Collaborative is hosted and staffed by the Jefferson Regional Foundation and emerged from the first Jefferson Forum in 2015.

For more information about this initiative, visit www.aroundthetablesouth.org
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For more information about the Jefferson Regional Foundation or the Jefferson Community Collaborative www.jeffersonrf.org or call 412.267.6770.
