

## Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project: Community Engagement Throughout the Years

From 2009 to 2018, the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation® (MHIF) conducted real-world population health research with Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project (HONU) in rural New Ulm, Minn. HONU is an award-winning population health initiative that MHIF originally designed in partnership with key community partners, including New Ulm Medical Center, as a 10-year demonstration project to identify and deliver the best interventions to reduce cardiovascular disease at a population level.

The project continues today as a community-owned health initiative focused on three significant and widespread health issues: 1) Healthy lifestyles across the lifespan, 2) Mental health and 3) Addiction and risky use of substances.



**Audra Shaneman**

Here we share some insights from Audra Shaneman, former president of the New Ulm Area Chamber of Commerce, about her experience with HONU's engagement throughout the years.

### Q: How has the community embraced HONU since it was started in 2009?

**Shaneman:** HONU has truly become a part of our culture. We have been willing to try the healthy changes. The community is willing to consider these changes and try them. Sometimes these changes work and sometimes they don't, but regardless, there is that willingness from the community. The town has also embraced the attention the program has gotten and the statistics about the healthy progress. I'm particularly proud of the worksite wellness program that HONU started and the supportive environments and programs that employers have created for employees that want a healthier worksite.

### Q: What types of health and wellness practices have businesses embraced?

**Shaneman:** Overall, there has been some real growth and change. Some companies have really latched onto the new practices. For example, there was a no-sugar beverage policy implemented at the medical center and I think that encouraged other businesses to try new things. It's also been great to see employees in the worksites walk more and be open to conversations about being healthy. People aren't quiet about it anymore! From tobacco-free campuses to healthier vending options, lunch-n-learns, company run-walk events, other types of fitness challenges, and much more, New Ulm-area employers are realizing that healthier employees provide a boost to productivity, morale and the bottom line.

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### Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation's Population Health Vision

To simplify and accelerate rural community health improvement efforts for sustainability and impact.

### More Information on This Topic

A 20-minute documentary, "The Story of New Ulm: A Population Health Transformation," produced by Health Catalyst, highlights the importance of The Heart of New Ulm Project from a national health care perspective.

Watch it online at  
[www.tinyurl.com/TransformNewUlm](http://www.tinyurl.com/TransformNewUlm)



**Q: What kind of changes in overall attitudes have you seen HONU bring upon the community?**

**Shaneman:** Throughout the years, people have become extremely familiar with HONU. Very rarely does someone say HONU and no one knows what is being talked about. You can see how much the project has truly impacted the community. People have changed their attitude and have become more open to the conversation about healthful decisions. They have become familiar and comfortable with a program that is about health and making healthful choices.

**Q: How has the involvement from the community in the project changed throughout the years?**

**Shaneman:** There has been a transition in the community from advisory with the project to ownership. It's been remarkable to be able to watch the relationship and network change into something that the community takes ownership over. The town has embraced these practices and this lifestyle and has made it their own. There has been a transition from learning about healthful habits to taking an initiative in the healthful decisions the community makes.

“ I think the one of the most valuable components of HONU has been the push of conversations around health as a community. We would've never pushed those conversations if the resources and targeted effort wasn't there, and thank goodness the results are there. New Ulm didn't lose its heritage or identity, we just care more about our community. ”

**Q: What were the uncertainties, if any, in the beginning of the project from members of the community?**

**Shaneman:** There was some hesitation about why we were chosen for the project. I think that MHIF does a great job about stating why they are here and reporting the results. The town has developed a good understanding that this isn't just a research project and that this is something that is going to impact the community in a positive way. From there, the uncertainties have transitioned into the town making these healthful habits a personal choice.

**Q: What parts of HONU have you found to be the most valuable for New Ulm?**

**Shaneman:** I think that one of the most valuable components of HONU has been the push of conversations around health as a community. We would've never pushed those conversations if the resources and targeted effort wasn't there, and thank goodness the results are there. The introduction of these conversations has pushed the community to make a change and stick with it. It's remarkable because that initial conversation has trickled into so many other conversations, such as safe streets and nutrition. New Ulm didn't lose its heritage or identity, we just care more about our community.

## Connect With Us at the MHIF Rural Health Transformation Center!

For more information on how our community rural health consulting services can help you, please contact us:

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The Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation® is a research and education foundation that aims to create a world without heart and vascular disease.

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