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Standing close to the new KEYS website are (clockwise from left) President and CEO of The Greater York Region Chamber of Commerce, Jon Prichard, Associate Professor of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Kristen Whiting-Grant, Maine Sea Grant and University of Maine Cooperative Extension Associate, Glen MacWilliams, President of The Community Wellness Coalition and Diane Brandon Coordinator of the Community Wellness Coalition.  
Amy Root-Donle

Web site features local communities

By Jennifer Feals

YORK "" After taking a look at a new Web site covering issues in the local area, residents of southern Maine might just be convinced to change their home pages.

Keysregion.org offers information on the towns of Kittery, Eliot, York and South Berwick. The KEYS region contains these four southernmost towns in Maine, which are separated by the Piscataqua River from the greater Portsmouth, N.H., area.

The site outlines ways to get involved in the community through local events and initiatives, offers details about the communities, and also lists numerous resources for finding help on a variety of topics throughout the towns.

The site was created through the Community Wellness Coalition to provide a resource to the towns covered, Community Wellness/KEYS Coalition Coordinator Diane Brandon

said.

"The goal was to give this area a self-awareness and a sense of identity," she said. "We are part of this little southern tip of Maine. We don't have a naturally shared identity, but what are we part of? There's the greater Seacoast "" we're part of that "" but we are in Maine not New Hampshire."

Planning for the site took place from 2004 to 2006, Brandon said. During that time, a diverse group of approximately 200 citizens and local leaders collaborated in "Our Future by Design: Working Better Together," a gathering of information on various subjects, such as transportation, economy, housing and environment in the KEYS communities.

A list of a dozen other topics are also covered on the site. Each offers related resources or "community indicators," showing where the region is currently in regards to the topic and where it hopes to progress in the future. Resident comments and connections to other topics also are available.

"This is there for citizens, nonprofit organizations, schools "" anyone trying to address different issues," Brandon said. "We are the clearing houses, the go-betweens. We can be the ears to hear what people are interested in and then we can advocate for our region. We know what the issues are, collect the information and make them accessible."

Kristen Whiting-Grant, extension associate for Maine Sea Grant and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension at the Wells Reserve, coordinated the Web site's section dedicated to the KEYS region's environment.

Over six months, Whiting-Grant's group collected environmental information from local people knowledgeable in areas such as growth and development and recycling, she said.

"We listened to presentations from people that could tell about economic development challenges, growth issues, et cetera, and from the information we received from local experts, we developed our portion of the site," she said.

"You might have a sense of what kinds of changes you've seen over the course of your lifetime looking at land development, but here you can actually go to the Web site and get some data in very concrete terms of open space and land development."

Each of the groups covering different topics collected information in much the same way, Whiting-Grant said.

"It's a great place where lots of data has been collected," she said. "Someone could find that it's really interesting to get in there and dig around a little "" find factoids about the KEYS region that you don't have at your fingertips generally."

Brandon said this is exactly what she hopes happens. She encourages residents to "poke around" on the site and she hopes, "go through a process of discovery" about their towns.

"I hope they say, Oh, that's neat. I want to know more,' or I don't like that. I hope it will change. How do I make that happen?"

Check out the Keys Region Web site at [www.keysregion.org](http://www.keysregion.org)

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