Defining community as a county

Who or what is the Charlevoix County Community?

What does the word "community" mean in a county with three towns, 15 townships, one village, and three "Census Designated Places"?

Do we really have 22 separate communities based on geographic boundaries and census lists?

The wisdom of Google is not helpful in answering this question. If you search for "Charlevoix County Community," you get five web listings for the Charlevoix Community Foundation, the Charlevoix County official site, the Conservation District, and the Department of Health and Human Services. I'm hard-pressed to define our community based on this list.

Each of our towns and our village are unique and special in terms of their history and what they offer their residents and visitors. The townships have their independent boards of trustees to attend to the unique characteristics and constituents within their boundaries. To make matters more difficult, the residents, a large percentage would say that the water and the adjoining land played a significant role in their decision to be here.

The population of Charlevoix County is just under 26,000. The good news is that within that group there are more than 1,000 members who have committed to making water quality on the Jordan and Boyne Rivers and the Lake Charlevoix watershed a part of their lives. These members have written checks, volunteered their time, or lent their expertise in support of activities that protect and preserve what we have in our county.

The list of activities includes: controlling invasive phragmites, surveying for swimmer's itch, assessing the quality of the lake's shoreline, monitoring the discharge of the Jordan River and the level of the Boyne River, educating the students in all of our high schools through the Watershed Academy and our fifth and sixth-graders through Students Experience Lake Charlevoix, removing trash from the Boyne and Jordan rivers, and starting a plastics...
Can there possibly be a unifying factor within our disparate boundaries that can bind us together in community? Actually, there is. A distinguishing characteristic of Charlevoix County is that most of it is wet, very wet. About 70 percent (974 square miles) of the surface of Charlevoix County is water, leaving us a mere 416 square miles to live on.

If you look up the word “community” in Webster’s Dictionary, you find a dozen choices. The one I think most appropriate in this context is “the people with common interests living in a particular area.” It says community is about people. It says community is based on common interests. It says community has physical boundaries. Our county fits that definition. We all have our reasons for living in the Charlevoix County community.

I am guessing that if I were to interview a representative sample of its residents and starting a plastics reduction initiative across much of the county.

Indeed, a thousand people committed to protecting our lakes, rivers and streams is wonderful. However, that figure represents only 4 percent of the community. It is far easier to keep a lake healthy than it is to restore it. Please join in the preservation of our Lake Charlevoix community watershed. It’s ours to protect. Learn more at lakecharlevoix.org, boyneriver.org, friendsofhejordan.org.

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