

# PUBLIC LIFE

November 2006 – Volume 3, Issue 6  
Owensboro, Kentucky

# Advocate

**PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**PRIVATE SCHOOL**

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# About our Editorial Board



## Rodney B. Berry

Rodney is president of the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro. He joined the foundation in 2000 following twelve years with RiverPark (performing arts) Center. His volunteer and civic experience includes work in education, health care, youth, social services, tourism, and community development. He is a graduate of Western Kentucky University.



## Dave Boeyink

Dave is Associate Professor of Journalism and Director of Media Studies, Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions, Indiana University. He holds a B.A. degree from Central College and an M.T.S. and Ph.D. from Harvard University. From 1978-87, he was Editorial Page Editor for the *Messenger-Inquirer*. He has published articles in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *Newspaper Journal*, and *Journalism Quarterly*.



## Fran Ellers

Fran works as a writer, editor, and communications consultant. She is a former reporter with the Louisville *Courier-Journal* and was a frequent panelist on Kentucky Educational Television's "Comment on Kentucky." Her clients include the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, University of Kentucky Center for Rural Health, and the Kentucky League of Cities.



## John S. Hager

John established the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro in 1996 following the sale of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer* to the Belo Corporation (Dallas, TX). A graduate of Princeton University and the University of Michigan College of Law, he was a practicing attorney for 19 years prior to returning to the family newspaper in 1973. He has been involved in numerous civic initiatives, including a lead role in the establishment of the Owensboro Community College. In 1996, the Kentucky Press Association honored him with its "most valuable member" award. He was named to the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame in 2002.



## Ed Staats

Ed served The Associated Press for 41 years, as a reporter, editor and administrator in 10 AP offices, including the AP's headquarters in New York. He retired in mid-2002 ending a career that bridged the print, broadcast, cable, and online news businesses. At his retirement, he was in charge of AP's Kentucky operations, a position he had held since the mid-1980's. He is a member of the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame.

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# PUBLIC LIFE *Advocate*

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# School Choice & Special Needs

*By Benjamin Hoak*

Does a school choice bill to be considered in the upcoming state legislature reflect a commendable effort to address deficiencies in public school special education, or are proponents overselling the benefits in order to open the door for private school vouchers?

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## Beyond convincing



by Rodney Berry

On several occasions during the recent political campaign, my evenings at home were interrupted by phone calls from pollsters. At times it was difficult to understand the caller over the voices of other workers following the same script in nearby cubicles. Sometimes the questions were loaded; on other occasions it was clearly an effort to gauge the volatility of “hot button” issues and personalities: the Iraq War; immigration; same-sex marriage; abortion; Donald Rumsfeld; Mark Foley; Nancy Pelosi; Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Whatever the technique, the partisan polling we endure each election cycle works within the assumption that voting patterns have more to do with impulsive emotions than thoughtful consideration. The anything-to-win ethic of political campaigns uses polls to exploit the naiveté, misinformation, prejudices and apathy that plague the public mindset.

The task of political strategists is to influence elections, not to educate voters. They want to make us uneasy enough about one candidate so that we'll go with the lesser of the two evils on a parallel column of the voting machine.

Thus, the dichotomy: We share pride in a system that allows citizens from all walks of life a voice through their vote, yet we are uneasy about giving power to people who can be misled by professional manipulators.

Fortunately, the public can be protected from this kind of manipulation, but we must develop more effective ways to inform and educate the public. And that will require leaders who embrace this responsibility.

These leaders won't come from elected officials whose priority is to stay in office. They won't come from their allegiant staff, consultants or donors expecting access. They won't come from political parties, special interests or ideologues that write columns or rant on talk shows. They won't come from ministers who intimidate and

threaten with their own apocalyptic pronouncements.

They will come from people with integrity in the public sector, the private sector and the social/nonprofit sector – leaders, activists and everyday citizens who are not ready to give up on democratic ideals and the collective judgment of a well-informed public.

The first task of these leaders is to acknowledge that they don't have all the answers. They must make people feel welcomed in a process of civic engagement. They must listen to their stories and respect their points of view even when they are not articulate, insightful or consistent.

With that kind of leadership, people from all walks of life can have a meaningful role in shaping a vision for our community, region, state and nation.

Forums, neighborhood discussions and town hall meetings can expose issues that are more important to a community than political rhetoric. We can present information to civic and service clubs, professional associations and ad hoc committees. We can use newspaper and radio and pub-

lic access television to analyze facts, conditions and trends in ways all citizens can understand. Options and strategies can be explored, acknowledging the advantages and disadvantages of each.

We can face up to the costs, tradeoffs, and consequences. We can ask others to help us think through the tough decisions ahead.

All of this will encourage the public to question whether our public actions reflect what should be our public priorities:

- Is it more important to have the highest graduation rate or the best athletic facilities?
- Do we stimulate investment in our urban core where public facilities and services already exist or do we only support sprawling development?

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**The task of political strategists is to influence elections, not to educate voters...we must develop more effective ways to inform and educate the public.**

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## Contributors

### Chad Gesser



“Religion and spirituality play important roles in the lives of people in our world. Examining U.S. citizen opinions about religion and its public role yields some contradicting viewpoints. There continues to be a complex relationship between our individual religious and spiritual values and humanity's challenge to live in global harmony.”

Chad teaches Sociology at Owensboro Community and Technical College and relentlessly supports the University of Louisville Cardinals football team.

### Benjamin Hoak



As the son of a private school principal, Ben found it particularly interesting to learn about both sides of the school choice issue. He looks forward to tracking the proposed legislation through the 2007 Kentucky General Assembly.

Ben recently accepted a new position as assistant to the director of a major two-year study on adult education and literacy conducted by the National Commission on Adult Literacy.

### Lydia Johnson



“When I first started this project, I expected to find numerous instances of the IRS cracking down on churches that mix politics and religion. But I was quite surprised to see that the federal government is rather lenient. If there are allegations, it appears the IRS takes every measure to bring the churches back into compliance.”

A former *Messenger-Inquirer* reporter (1999-2003), Lydia is now Audubon Area Community Services Public Information and Outreach Director. In 2000, she received a Kentucky Press Association award for investigative reporting and, in 2001, was awarded a fellowship from the National Press Foundation.

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# School Choice & Special Needs

*By Benjamin Hoak*

Does a school choice bill to be considered in the upcoming state legislature reflect a commendable effort to address deficiencies in public school special education, or are proponents overselling the benefits in order to open the door for private school vouchers?



The idea that parents should have more publicly funded educational options for their children – popularly known as school choice – has long been hotly debated around the country, but has failed to get much attention in Kentucky.

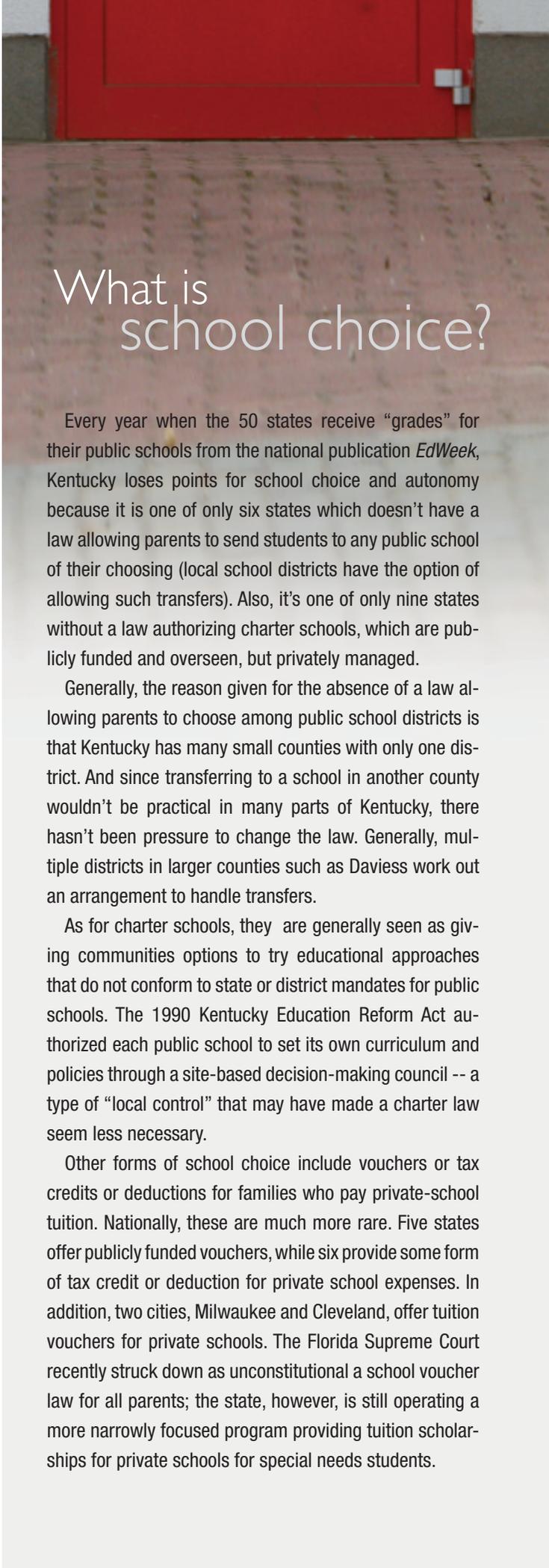
That changed earlier this year, when a bill was filed for consideration by the 2007 General Assembly that would allow parents of children with special needs to use tax dollars to pay for their children's education at any school they choose, including private and parochial schools. (Special needs generally refer to physical, mental, emotional or learning disabilities.)

Political lines already are being drawn on the bill, filed by state Rep. Stan Lee, R-Lexington. Critics say it would be a first step toward school vouchers for all Kentucky students, draining tax dollars from public schools.

Supporters don't deny that they hope the bill opens the door for vouchers for all, but also argue that it addresses an issue of great concern to many Kentucky families. Lee himself said he has "no designs on anything beyond that."

Both sides agree that Kentucky's current system of educating students with special needs has significant deficiencies that need addressing. Among other things, they say, Lee's bill will draw attention to this important subject.

The *Public Life Advocate* examined the arguments for and against the bill and how it might affect students with special needs in Daviess and surrounding counties. Generally, local school officials say the bill might not make a lot of difference, because public and private schools already collaborate to serve special needs students.



## What is school choice?

Every year when the 50 states receive "grades" for their public schools from the national publication *EdWeek*, Kentucky loses points for school choice and autonomy because it is one of only six states which doesn't have a law allowing parents to send students to any public school of their choosing (local school districts have the option of allowing such transfers). Also, it's one of only nine states without a law authorizing charter schools, which are publicly funded and overseen, but privately managed.

Generally, the reason given for the absence of a law allowing parents to choose among public school districts is that Kentucky has many small counties with only one district. And since transferring to a school in another county wouldn't be practical in many parts of Kentucky, there hasn't been pressure to change the law. Generally, multiple districts in larger counties such as Daviess work out an arrangement to handle transfers.

As for charter schools, they are generally seen as giving communities options to try educational approaches that do not conform to state or district mandates for public schools. The 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act authorized each public school to set its own curriculum and policies through a site-based decision-making council -- a type of "local control" that may have made a charter law seem less necessary.

Other forms of school choice include vouchers or tax credits or deductions for families who pay private-school tuition. Nationally, these are much more rare. Five states offer publicly funded vouchers, while six provide some form of tax credit or deduction for private school expenses. In addition, two cities, Milwaukee and Cleveland, offer tuition vouchers for private schools. The Florida Supreme Court recently struck down as unconstitutional a school voucher law for all parents; the state, however, is still operating a more narrowly focused program providing tuition scholarships for private schools for special needs students.

## How do Owensboro and Daviess County's special needs systems measure up?

Kentucky Performance Reports from the Kentucky Department of Education indicate how well school districts in the state are meeting their special needs goals as set by the federal No Child Left Behind law. Goals have been set relatively low until now, said Cindy Baumert, an advocate for special needs students. But beginning in 2008, the goals increase sharply until 2014, when 100 percent of students should be learning at grade level or above, she said.

Even though a district may be meeting state and federal goals, "the academic achievement of students with disabilities such that they can successfully enter postsecondary education or employment is not a pretty picture," Baumert said. "These kids are sold short because it takes something more creative than assembly-line schools and teaching for these children to learn."

Owensboro Public Schools and Daviess County Public Schools are both meeting their special needs goals thus far, though there is still an "achievement gap" between students with special needs and those without.

In fourth grade reading in the spring of 2006, 16 percent of Owensboro Public School students with disabilities were not proficient, while 11 percent of students without disabilities were not proficient, a gap of five points. In Daviess County fourth grade reading, 22 percent of students with disabilities were not proficient compared to 10 percent of students without disabilities who were not proficient. That's a gap of 12 points between the two groups.

However the gap is larger for older students. In tenth grade reading in the spring of 2006, 61 percent of Owensboro students with disabilities were not proficient, and 34 percent of students without disabilities were not proficient, a 27 point gap. In Daviess County, 83 percent of students with disabilities were not proficient (which is actually below the goal of nearly 30 percent proficiency), and 39 percent of students without disabilities were not proficient. That's a 44 point gap.

In 2005, The Kentucky Association of School Councils used data from the Kentucky Department of Education to rank the Kentucky schools which had the strongest results from their programs for students with disabilities. Some local schools led the list. Among elementary schools, Deer Park and East View Elementary Schools in Daviess County ranked number one and two, respectively. Among middle schools, Daviess County Middle School was fifth, McLean County Middle School was sixth, and Burns Middle School was seventh. Among high schools, Ohio County High School ranked fifth.

## School Choice and Special Needs

### What the bill would do

Already some public money goes to private schools for educating children with special needs.

Out of 650,000 public school students in Kentucky, about 110,000 are classified as students with special needs, including 2,000 in Daviess County.

Each public school district receives federal money for special needs students through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. Federal law requires that the money be spent on students attending any school within a district's boundaries, including a private school or home school. Currently, 2,500 special needs students in Kentucky are attending public schools that are not in their home districts or private schools. About 32 of the private-school students are in Daviess County.

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**... of 650,000 public school students in Kentucky, about 110,000 are classified as students with special needs, including 2,000 in Daviess County.**

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Here's how the federal funding flow works for special needs students in private or home schools: Daviess County Public Schools receives about \$35,000 per year for the 32 private-school students. District and private school officials need to determine how best to divide up the money, based on the students' needs and how they will be met. Some students have more needs than others; any services the school district provides for those students (beyond what their own schools provide) are funded through IDEA.

Under Lee's bill, however, all public funds that would normally be spent on a special needs student's instruction would follow the student to the school of choice, including a private school.

That would include about \$3,500 per year in funds that the state spends per student in Kentucky, plus the federal money and additional public funds for special needs instruction (from \$4,000 to \$12,000). The bill also requires the student's public school district to provide transportation to the school the parents choose. And it allows parents to send their child to a public school in another district if they choose.

### Different school funding philosophies

Officials with the Bluegrass Institute, a public policy think tank based in Bowling Green which has long advocated for allowing all Kentucky parents to use tax money to send their children to private schools, helped Lee develop the bill. In general, the institute supports a free market approach to education – the idea that competition for students would force schools to do a better job.

"The education policy of the state of Kentucky does not allow parents to make a decision about their children knowing that their funding will follow," said Jim Waters, policy and communications director for the institute.

That policy is rooted in the Kentucky Constitution, which prohibits the use of tax dollars for private education. Most other states have a similar approach.

However five states allow publicly funded school vouchers, while six allow tax credits or deductions for private schooling. And two others, Florida and Utah, have created voucher programs for special needs students.

Waters and Lee maintain that Kentucky Supreme Court precedent provides an exception to Kentucky's constitutional prohibition on private school funding in regard to students with special needs or learning disabilities.

And if the legislature permits parents of special needs students to use

state and local funds for private schools, that might pave the way for allowing all students to do so, according to Waters. Presumably that would require a constitutional amendment approved by Kentucky voters.

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## **We are helping open the door to educational liberty in Kentucky...**

**Jim Waters**  
**The Bluegrass Institute**

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“We thought it would be tougher (for lawmakers and the public) to look at this (special needs) program and say no,” he said. “We are helping open the door to educational liberty in Kentucky (and) we are beginning with the people who need it the most. We strongly believe that all Kentucky parents should eventually have the right to place their children in the school that (gives) the best opportunity to succeed in life.”

The philosophical argument against such a system, made by groups such as the Kentucky Education Association, which represents public school teachers, is that public money should go to fund public schools, which are already struggling because of too little funding in all areas, including special needs education.

The KEA maintains, for instance, that the federal funding bill, IDEA, has never provided adequate funds to educate special needs students. Expected to provide about 40 percent of the cost of educating special needs students, it actually provides about 18 percent, according to Daviess County officials. To compound the problem, the funds that schools do get are still based on the student population in 1998; in Daviess County, there almost 800 more special needs students now than in 1998.

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**Expected to provide about 40 percent of the cost of educating special needs students, it (the federal funding bill) actually provides about 18 percent...(and is) still based on the student population in 1998; in Daviess County, there are almost 800 more special needs students now than in 1998.**

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There is also the question of whether competition for public schools – from charter schools or private schools – results in better education, as advocates of school choice argue. A study by the U.S. Department of Education released this year found that children in public schools scored as well or better on tests in reading and math as children in private schools, with the exception of eighth grade reading. Critics argue that the study is flawed.

Bob Sexton, executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, an independent group of education volunteers based in Lexington, Ky., said the group doesn't have a strong position

Owensboro's state lawmakers said they had not yet read the bill draft and did not want to commit to supporting it. They did say, however, that they would consider it.

Sen. David Boswell, D-Owensboro, said he “would not support a voucher program” but leans “more toward tuition tax credits” for parents who send their children to private schools. He said Lee's bill “sounds like a very good idea,” though he and Lee don't always agree on issues and he'd have to look at the bill's language before deciding to support it.

Boswell said that in the past, he has supported certain incentives for parochial school students, such as funds to ride public transportation.

“Students need financial aid,” he said. “I'm certainly in support of offering some type of assistance to private schools. There are areas we can (do that) without destroying the spirit of public education funding.”

“I'm a strong advocate for public education. At the same time, if we nail shut the doors of every private and parochial school, we wouldn't be able to raise taxes fast enough to build schools,” he said.

State Rep. Joe Bowen, R-Owensboro, said he has received emails about the school choice issue, but it's not a dominant theme (Bowen was interviewed before his loss in the November election). “All politics are personal,” he said. “It's how it affects you personally; if you're in that situation, you want all the opportunities you can get. We have to be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars. Education is 60 percent of the budget; we have to ... find a good balance, common ground to the common good.”

Bowen did praise Lee as a good legislator who brings thought to his bills. “He's smart, articulate, certainly researches any legislation he brings forth. I trust his judgment on most issues. I have respect for Stan Lee,” he said.

State Rep. Tommy Thompson, D-Owensboro, also said he had heard little about school choice, but that it would probably get more attention as the legislative session gets closer. “A lot of people don't want to give up on our public schools, so to speak. Education resources are very limited. I think the concern is genuine, in terms of making sure we're trying to do everything possible to help special needs children.”

Thompson said he would like to have more information before he makes a decision on the bill. Specifically, he thinks it would be helpful to conduct a district-by-district survey showing how many special needs students are not getting the services they need and what kind of capacity each district has to meet special needs. His concern is that too many special needs students will flock to one district and put strain on it; on other hand, he said, he doesn't want parents in rural districts to say, “This is great, (but) why provide the funding if there's no place to receive the service?”

“It's a great idea,” he said. “I'd like to see us have more information. We need to do something about it (and) do it in a pragmatic, systemic, professional way.”

Lee predicted that if his bill was approved by committee and made it to the House floor, there would be enough votes for the measure to pass. However Susan Weston, an education consultant who works with school councils, said the bill may have a hard time making it that far because Lee is a member of the minority party and doesn't serve on the House Education Committee or in a leadership position.

For now, Lee said he will try to get a hearing for his bill: “If there are positive attributes, let's talk about them. If there are shortcomings, let's talk about that too. Let's do something good.”

# School Choice and Special Needs

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on the bill, but he thinks removing some students from public school is a narrow strategy that won't help all students achieve a high level of learning.

"What it ignores is the question of how to improve services to all 110,000 of these (special needs) children," he said. "Our concern is for all those children. The advocates of school choice just have not ever, that I've seen, dealt with that question of how do you help all students improve?"

## Is this the answer for special needs students?

Would either the private school option or more funding for public schools actually improve the education that special needs students receive?

Cindy Baumert, an education advocate from Louisville who has been involved with the public schools' special needs system for the past seven years, believes few children are being well-served. "The status of special education is terrible," she said bluntly.

But she also doesn't think Lee's bill will improve it. That's because in her view, the problems with the system are related to other aspects of federal legislation, including IDEA and the No Child Left Behind law.

For instance, Baumert said, special needs students used to be segregated from the general population with their own teachers. But they must now be integrated into regular classrooms, and special education teachers and regular teachers must collaborate.

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## The status of special education is terrible.

**Cindy Baumert**  
Education Advocate

Often the teachers don't really know how, Baumert said. "That's not to say we don't have excellent people working in the special education system," she said. "It just needs a lot of attention. There's just a severe lack of training."

Many parents struggle as they try to understand the law and help their children, and Baumert said she understands how Lee's bill would be attractive to them.

But "its effectiveness won't be what it appears to be," she argued. "The odds that the district around you is doing a better job than the one you're in are pretty slim."

In addition, private schools won't be equipped to deal with the possible influx of special needs students, she said. And if they do take more students, they will still have to work with the public school district to help them implement IDEA, she said. Thus frustrated parents could end up dealing with the same personnel who were the source of their original problems.

Baumert would rather see a bill that would provide adequate technology for public schools that need it and would require training for parents and teachers, including an emphasis on how regular teachers and special education teachers should collaborate.

## Debate over more choices

Lee and Waters argue, however, that increasing the flow of potential funding to private schools would increase their capacity. They noted there are already more than 400 private schools in Kentucky (there are 1,249 public schools in 175 districts), many of which serve special needs children.

"If this bill passes," Waters said, "it will change the dynamics. Once funding can follow the child, more schools will be created to serve our special needs kids because the funding will be there."

Lee said that after Florida began implementing a voucher program for special needs students, the number of non-public schools participating in the program increased from 100 schools in 2000 to 751 in 2006. (Florida's wider school voucher program has been declared unconstitutional.)

On the other hand, Susan Weston, a consultant on education issues and the former executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Councils, said she's not sure that a careful business analysis would support the prediction of many more private schools in Kentucky serving special needs students.

"Building a new school building is a huge expense," she said. She's afraid advocates are either overselling how many options parents will have or overestimating the budget effects of the bill. (Waters estimates that schools will save \$5,100 for every child that gets a scholarship under this bill.)

Still, "I think for a small set of kids this (bill) will make a positive difference," she said. "Some parents are on the brink of being able to pay tuition."

The KEA argues that school choice currently exists, according to its president, Frances Steenburgen. If parents think their children's needs are not being met, they can use their due process rights to set up a hearing (or even file suit) to determine whether a school district is meeting their child's needs, she said.

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## ...for a small set of kids this (bill) will make a positive difference.

**Susan Weston**  
Consultant and former Executive Director  
Kentucky Association of School Councils

"The whole issue is the needs of the student, not parental preference or convenience," she said. "Meaningful involvement of parents is essential, but it's still the professional knowledge of educators that plays a major role."

## Owensboro

All of which leads to the situation in the Owensboro area, where students don't seem to be facing much of a dilemma, according to local superintendents and principals.

"We don't hear a lot about it (school choice) because we exercise a lot of choice in this school district," said Larry Vick, superintendent of Owensboro Public Schools. He said because the law permits local school boards to control how many students can transfer into their school district, the Owensboro and Daviess County districts, as well as some of the surrounding districts, have open enrollment policies among themselves. If students are in good standing at one school, they're welcome to transfer to another, provided they pay a small amount of tuition, Vick said.

"We do get quite a few requests for tuition and transfers into our district (because of) our special needs kids," said Daviess County Public Schools Superintendent Tom Shelton. "We have an exemplary program; there are a lot of people who want in. It's simply based on classroom sizes; we don't allow transfers or tuition that cause staffing issues."

Shelton also pointed to the River Region Cooperative, a special

# School Choice and Special Needs

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education cooperative formed by the Daviess County and Owensboro districts and other surrounding districts. The cooperative offers highly trained special education consultants who provide extra support and services where they're needed.

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## **...the Owensboro and Daviess County districts, as well as some of the surrounding districts, have open enrollment policies among themselves.**

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"We have a tremendous special needs program," Vick said. "We think we're doing our dead level best to meet the needs of all of our kids."

Vick also said he would not support sending public resources to private schools for any reason. "We think we have an adequate program for all our kids," he said. "If you've got a public school system, (and) someone wants to go to a different one, maybe you need to improve yours. We want to have the kind of school system people want to attend. If the program is not adequate in public schools, it's their responsibility as legislators to give us the resources to have better programs."

### **Public-private school interaction**

Owensboro Catholic Schools is the largest private school system in Daviess County, with four schools and about 1,300 students. While the Catholic school system does employ a differential learning specialist who teaches at the elementary schools and is involved in consultations, Superintendent Jim Mattingly said, "Getting deeply involved in special education is beyond our resources at the current time."

"I believe the parents feel comfortable in their ability to choose what is best for their children," he said.

Tim Hoak, principal at Heritage Christian School, the largest non-Catholic private school in Daviess County (193 students from pre-school to eighth grade), agreed. Heritage teachers work with special needs students on a limited basis, but "sometimes there are needs we can't meet," he said. Some Heritage students have even transferred to Daviess County schools when extensive special needs have surfaced, he said.

Hoak said Heritage, which is located in the county school district, has an excellent working relationship with Daviess County Public School staff. "We sometimes even coordinate with the public schools if a child needs services they can't get here, but are offered at Country Heights (Elementary School in the Daviess County district)," he said. Students will go to Country Heights for an hour or two of instruction and then return to Heritage. "The county schools are fine with that, they're happy to work with us," he said. "They've been great to work with."

Ken Roberts, director of special education for Daviess County Public Schools, said most of the federal funds for Daviess County's special needs students goes towards speech therapy. Throughout the year, special education consultants such as Krystal Goins, one of three consultants with the county school system, work with private schools on their special needs referrals. Goins can screen children and recommend further testing for them; if a student needs a service plan (the private school equivalent of the public school Individual Education Plan, which is required by IDEA), Goins can help the schools decide how best to meet that plan.

If a private school cannot meet all of the plan's requirements, the student can go to a county school for specific instruction. In some cases, the parents, administrators, teachers and consultants involved may decide a student should attend public school full-time to receive the individualized instruction he or she needs.

Goins said she has open communication with the private schools she works with (Heritage, Mary Carrico, Whitesville Trinity and the Owensboro Catholic Elementary K-3 campus). "So far this school year, I've probably worked with at least 10 private school parents or students," she said. "I've enjoyed working with private schools. We don't want it to be difficult for parents. We're there to help; we understand that nobody is as emotionally attached to your kid as you are."

Vicki Warren, a retired special education teacher from Owensboro Public Schools, now serves as the differentiated learning specialist for Owensboro Catholic Schools. She doesn't run a full special education program, but the Catholic system employs a speech therapist and teachers meet as many needs as they can. Because of Warren's background, she can help determine what students need and whether or not she needs to call in help from the public schools (some of Owensboro Catholic schools are located in the city and some in the county). "If I call about something, Krystal (Goins) is great," she said. "She'll come and observe and help supply anything we might need. The city does the same thing."

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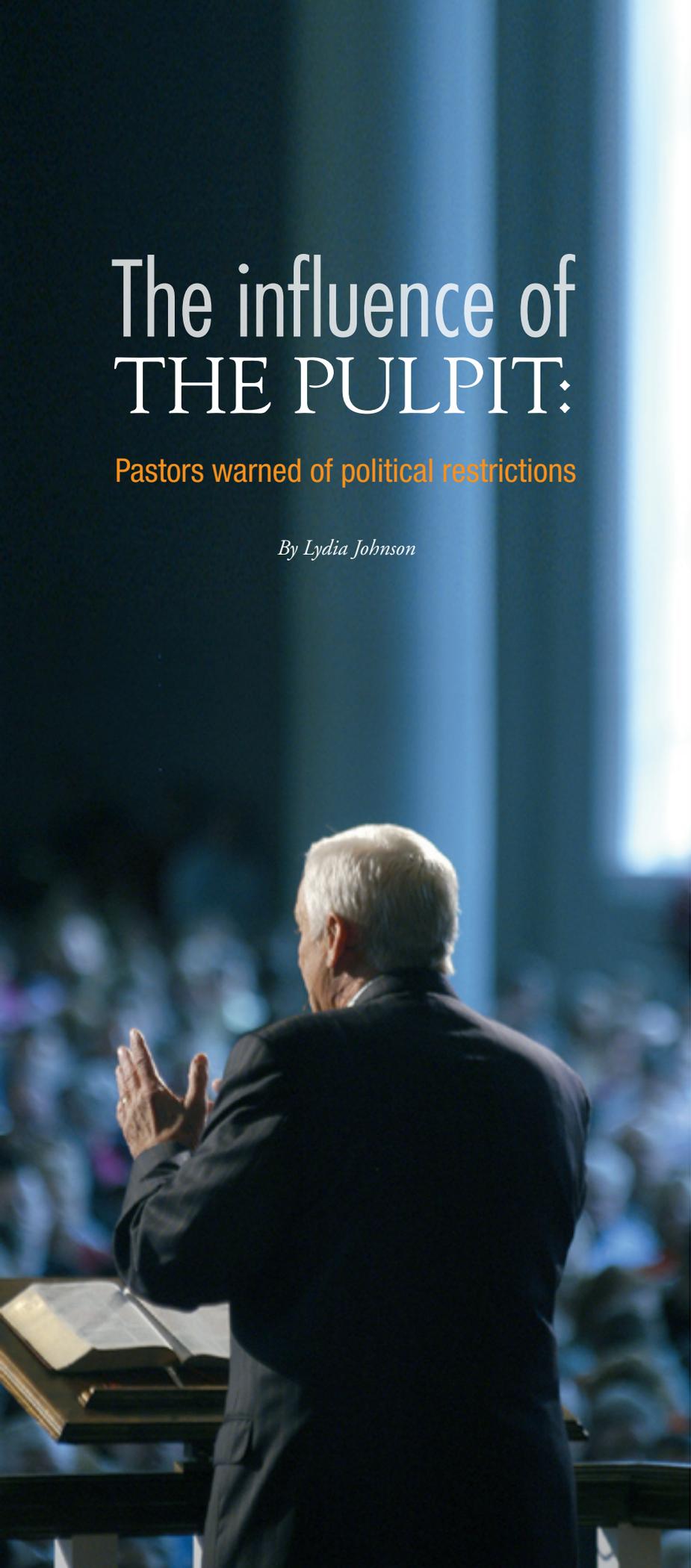
## **...if a (Heritage Christian School) child needs services they can't get here, but are offered at Country Heights... Students will go to Country Heights for an hour or two of instruction and then return to Heritage.**

**Tim Hoak, Principal  
Heritage Christian School**

Rick Triplett, who runs the Triplett Montessori School in Owensboro, said he doesn't deal often with the public schools' special needs systems. The Montessori method of education emphasizes individual instruction, which is essentially what special education is, he said. He spent 10 years working in a public school system as a teacher and administrator, and estimates that his current school has about the same fraction of special needs children as the public schools do.

He said Lee's bill probably won't have much effect on private schools and only indirectly addresses their concerns. "On the one hand, we like to see any flexibility (options) that will help a child get an appropriate education," he said. "On the other hand, we're not thrilled with education being provided through the government."

Majesty Academy is a small Christian school in Owensboro with 33 students. Marian Turley, vice-president of the board of the school, said Majesty can accommodate some special needs because they have a small student-to-teacher ratio, but the school doesn't solicit special needs students. She said Lee's bill probably wouldn't affect Majesty, but "It's a shame that parents who want their children to have private education have to pay for public education (with taxes) and for private education." ■



# The influence of THE PULPIT:

Pastors warned of political restrictions

*By Lydia Johnson*

Do local churches try to make a difference at the voting booth during election time, and if so, how far do they go?

Under federal law, churches, charities and other nonprofits are prohibited from engaging in political campaign activities that promote or oppose candidates or political parties. If they do so, they could lose their tax-exempt status.

But during the 2004 elections, churches and charities across the U.S. seemed to take a more aggressive political role, resulting in an array of complaints. The Internal Revenue Service investigated and found that, indeed, some churches and charities were engaging in prohibited activities. Rather than pursue prosecutions in most cases, the IRS decided to issue guidelines, putting the organizations on notice for the 2006 elections.

Still, churches have much latitude during election time and some push the law to its limits – the IRS is now investigating complaints against an organization of Christian conservative ministers in Ohio which is accused of helping a candidate win the Republican nomination for governor this past spring.

Given the national debate, the *Public Life Advocate* set out to learn the views of a sample of local ministers on mixing politics and religion. While many of those interviewed do include political messages in their sermons, most said they believe that there are limits to what churches should do and that they are aware of the limits imposed by federal tax laws.



### Politics and the pulpit don't mix, some say

The Rev. Carl McCarthy of St. Joseph and Paul said he welcomes the educational campaign that the IRS began earlier this year to inform churches what they can and cannot do this election season. He doesn't want to see a repeat of the past presidential election when a Catholic priest refused to give communion to Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic candidate. Since then, the Catholic Church has stepped up efforts to avoid similar problems.

"We have been cautioned to be very careful about what we say and to remember that we are not to promote a particular party," McCarthy said. "That's not our purpose. Our purpose is to teach the love of Jesus."

The Catholic Church encourages members of the congregation to learn about issues and candidates and to vote, McCarthy added, but it does not urge them to vote in any particular way.

Preaching politics from the pulpit is "a great disservice to the political system," McCarthy added.

The Rev. Pat Connell of Trinity Episcopal holds similar views. Christians have an obligation to vote and to shape the world in which they live, he said. But that stops at encouraging the members of the congregation how to vote. Connell said he doesn't provide them with voter guides, he doesn't mention political candidates in his sermons when discussing issues, and he declines when he's asked to hold political events.

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**"Neither party is particularly Christian. It's not a religious party but a political party."**

Rev. Pat Connell  
Trinity Episcopal Church

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"This is a mistake that we are making in the political arena today, (thinking) that one party is more faithful than the other," Connell said. "Neither party is particularly Christian. It's not a religious party but a political party."

Connell does encourage his parishioners to consider issues that would help to shape a larger "moral vision" without concentrating solely on one particular issue. "The moral imperative is to create a moral vision," Connell said. "I will never speak of specific issues from the pulpit."

The Rev. Jonathon Carroll of First Presbyterian Church agrees that churches have a duty to educate their congregations on issues of the

## Many churches engaged in political activities in 2004 election

The Internal Revenue Service began a push to educate tax-exempt organizations about regulations that govern their tax-exempt status after receiving numerous complaints about partisan preaching during the 2004 election. In a study of 132 tax-exempt organizations, many of them churches, nearly three quarters were found to have engaged in political campaigning to some degree. In 55 cases, the IRS issued a written advisory. In three, it recommended revoking tax-exempt status (none of the three cases involved churches).

Many of the cases involved one-time violations or violations that could be addressed "short of revocation," said Steve Pyrek, director of communication for the Tax-Exempt Government Entities with the IRS.

Altogether since 2004, the IRS has revoked the the 501(c)(3) status of 42 nonprofits, though none of them were churches. In fact, only one church has ever lost its tax-exempt status – the Church at Pierce Creek in Binghamton, N.Y., in 1992. It had placed a full-page advertisement in *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* that attacked then Gov. Bill Clinton as a supporter of abortion, condoms in schools and homosexuality. "How then can we vote for Bill Clinton?" the ad asked. The church was listed as providing funding to support the ad.

After the ad ran, several articles in *The New York Times* questioned whether the church had violated IRS tax laws, which led the IRS to request information from the church on its activities. In 1995, the IRS revoked the church's tax-exempt status retroactive to January 1992. The church appealed the ruling but the courts upheld the IRS.

The IRS can initiate a tax inquiry against a church only if its director of Exempt Organizations believes, based on a written summary of findings, that the church is not eligible for exempt status or is not paying tax that it should.

The IRS is not in the business of closing church doors, Pyrek said. But it must ensure that churches are abiding by the law. Providing literature on political parties, encouraging voter registration and even educating a congregation on views of candidates is clearly allowed by the IRS as long as churches do not promote one candidate over the other. In its "Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations," the IRS states specifically what a church can and cannot do and gives examples of common situations that may arise. For instance:

- It is permissible for a minister to be named in an advertisement as supporting a political candidate if the ad contains a statement that says the minister's title and affiliation is included for identification purposes only. But a minister cannot in his church's newsletter promote one candidate over another, even if he pays for that one publication from his own pocket.
- A minister can endorse a candidate as long as it is not done at an official church function, in an official church publication or paid for by church funds. But a minister cannot from his pulpit tell his congregation to vote a particular way.
- A minister can invite a candidate to speak at a church-sponsored event as long as he gives equal time to all candidates, he does not endorse any of them, all candidates are asked the same questions and all candidates are given equal time for speaking.
- Voter guides are allowed as long as all candidates' views are expressed in an unbiased fashion or are in the candidates' own words.

Even with their extensive guidelines, the IRS must often determine whether a church has engaged in illegal politicking on a case-by-case basis, Pyrek said.

"The last recourse is revocation," he said. "That's what we do if all else fails."

# The Influence of the Pulpit

day, but he “would never mention a person or a platform.” He doesn’t provide voter guides either. In fact, he won’t even place a campaign sign in his yard.

“It’s always better to speak out against issues but not against people,” he added. “That’s the biggest problem with churches these days. Everything is about people and not issues.”

Religion and politics should “dance,” he said, but one should not control the other. And while church leaders cannot ignore the relevance of the biblical teachings to current issues, they should not lead the congregation to the voting booth, he added. That would be a “violation of their intellect and their ability to come to their own conclusion based on their own understanding.”

## Voter guides used by some churches

Other local ministers do go further, providing their members with voter guides provided by a socially conservative organization, but said they do not discuss politics from the pulpit.

“We do have a responsibility to educate our people, but I don’t think the pulpit is the place to do that. The church was never designed to be a place to talk about politics,” said the Rev. Paul Strahan of First Baptist Church.

If asked, however, he would offer his views, he said. His church also provides voter guides distributed by the Family Trust Foundation of Kentucky, which is associated with the Family Foundation of Kentucky. The Family Foundation advocates for socially conservative political causes; in 2004, for instance, both the Family Trust Foundation and the Family Foundation contributed money to the campaign for a constitutional amendment in Kentucky to ban gay marriage.

However the foundation’s 2006 voter guides appear to follow the IRS guidelines in that they do not detail the foundation’s views (thus suggesting who to vote for). In addition, as the IRS advises, the guides pose questions on a variety of issues and allow candidates to respond in their own words.

The Rev. John Morse of Good Shepherd Assembly of God said he provides literature from the foundation as well, but he doesn’t promote one candidate over the other.

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**“any candidate that will stay within the mandates of the Bible, I encourage anybody to help promote them.”**

**Rev. Prince W. Woolfolk  
Seventh Street Church of God**

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“We’re not promoting anyone, but we tell them where all the candidates stand,” Morse said. “When we come together, we’re not here to focus on politics. We’re here to focus on Jesus and how to live his commandments.”

The Rev. Ted Christman of Heritage Baptist Church says his church also provides voter guides. But politics is not the church’s primary concern, he said.

“I don’t believe it’s our responsibility to suggest who people should vote for. I’m more in favor of helping our people obtain literature that objectively portrays the views of all parties. I don’t believe we should be telling our people who they should vote for. I wouldn’t even do that if it were legal, because I don’t think that’s what God has called a church to do.”

The Rev. Prince W. Woolfolk at the Seventh Street Church of God said he encourages his congregation to vote, but does not tell them how they must vote. But he said “any candidate that will stay within the mandates of the Bible, I encourage anybody to help promote them.” ■

## Making a Difference

### IMPACT 100 ANNOUNCES FIRST GRANT

Impact 100 awarded its first grant to Grandma’s Corner on October 26. The \$150,000 grant will be used for safety and health improvements at the facility: playground equipment, interior renovations, child-friendly restrooms and more, including a \$40,000 endowment for future enhancements and repairs.

Grandma’s Corner is a licensed, nonprofit child care facility that provides up to 100 hours of free care to children up to eight years of age whose family is in a crisis situation. The facility serves 4,000 children annually.

Impact 100 encourages women to become a part of the community through philanthropy. The group is comprised of 150 local women who contributed \$1,000 each toward the objective of donating the full amount to one local charity. President Martha Clark expects the program to be a recurring annual event, and hopes to bring more members to an expanding program each year.

Other finalists (from 29 applicants) included the Owensboro Symphony Orchestra, Owensboro Lion’s Club, Owensboro-Daviess County Humane Society, Wendell Foster’s Campus for Developmental Disabilities

### JUNIOR LEAGUE CONSIDERING YOUTH DENTAL NEEDS, EARLY LEARNING AS PRIORITY PROJECT

The Junior League of Owensboro is an organization of women committed to promoting volunteerism and improving the community through effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Every three years, the League initiates a strategic planning process to determine its signature project that benefits from organizational financial support and volunteerism.

Under the direction of the Community Research Committee, the League recently identified two finalist issues from eight examined by the committee and membership. The finalists: dental care for children without insurance; early learning and literacy.

During a recent Junior League meeting, Public Life Foundation president Rodney Berry reviewed the work of a citizen task force that has been studying the problem and examining options for addressing the youth dental challenges facing our community. Jana Beth Frances reviewed opportunities to improve early learning programs.

In coming months, the League will be ranking the issues, presenting recommendations and adopting the project for the coming year.



## Framing the Issue

# PRENATAL CARE FOR THE POOR:

Is our community positioned to meet the need?

By Rodney Berry  
Kathy Strobel, Research Assistant

Ninety percent of pregnant women in Owensboro-Daviess County receive prenatal care in the first trimester, which is six percent more than the national average. With the recent reduction in prenatal services at the health department, should we be concerned about our capacity to sustain this vital service?

## BACKGROUND

### Private care, public care

Approximately 1,400 babies are born in Daviess County each year. An estimated 900 pregnant women (63 percent) receive prenatal care through eight local obstetricians in private practice. Until recently, the 500 remaining women (37 percent) received prenatal services from two midwives at the Green River District Health Department. In any given month, the health department caseload was 250 to 300 pregnant women and another 40 to 50 new pregnant women turned to the department for care.

### Absorbing the cost of care

Most of the women served by obstetricians are insured through private insurance plans. Most who sought care at the health department were insured through Medicaid, a health care program funded by state and federal governments. To qualify for Medicaid, their annual incomes could not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level\*. The health department also provided prenatal care for women who did not qualify for Medicaid but could not afford health insurance.

### Problems in caring for the poor

Some obstetricians in private practice do not accept Medicaid and uninsured patients because their caseloads are already full and reimbursements from the Medicaid program are substantially less than reimbursements from insurance companies. Medicaid and uninsured patients also tend to miss appointments more often and are at high risk for complications. Poor women are more likely to smoke, not follow directions during pregnancy, and have substance abuse problems. And the language barrier, with an increasing number of immigrants here, is a hurdle to care.

\* Federal poverty level for single women without children: \$10,160

\* Federal poverty level for single women with two children: \$15,735

## BACKGROUND

### Medical supervision required

Government regulations require that the midwives at the health department be supervised by an obstetrician. Obstetricians claim that they must assume too much liability when providing oversight for health department midwives, and that drives up their already high malpractice insurance premiums.

### Forced to cut the program

This year, health department officials were unable to reach an agreement with local obstetricians to provide supervision. So in September 2006, under pressure from state regulators and insurance carriers, the health department eliminated much of its prenatal care program, including prenatal exams. The health department continues to provide various programs and services for pregnant women – nutrition counseling, Women, Infants and Children program, Building Stronger Families program, etc.

### Health department reaches out to obstetricians

Concerned that hundreds of pregnant women may not have access to prenatal care, health department officials approached local obstetricians to accept its Medicaid referrals. If patients do not qualify for Medicaid and are unable to pay, the health department offered to reimburse obstetricians the Medicaid rate by using a \$70,000 state grant and \$47,000 from local health taxes. Seven obstetricians agreed to accept established health department patients during their current pregnancy and four agreed to take new patients. A month into this referral system, 269 pregnant women patients had been accepted by local obstetricians.

### Different setting could be good or bad

Assigning pregnant women to obstetricians in private practice ensures continuity of care through delivery. It establishes a relationship between the doctor and patient that can benefit both the pregnant woman and her child. It creates a central location for medical records and ongoing care. However, some are concerned that Medicaid and uninsured pregnant women will feel less welcome in private practice settings.

### Essential questions

Given the volume and unique challenges in serving Medicaid and uninsured patients:

- Can four obstetricians absorb all the new patients who need prenatal care?
- Should they be expected to absorb this burden?
- If there are not enough obstetricians, where will these patients go for care?
- One alternative suggested is Madisonville's Trover Clinic (nearly an hour's drive, much of which is on poor roads), which provides medical oversight for three midwives. Is that the best service we can provide in Daviess County?
- Why can we not provide medical oversight for midwives in Daviess County while being satisfied to send our patients to another community that provides care through midwives?
- Should our community and health care providers develop a better plan?

Without proper prenatal care, babies are more likely to be born pre-term, putting them at high-risk for health problems and learning disabilities. The pregnant women who are most vulnerable are poor, single mothers and immigrants.

## WHAT ABOUT PRENATAL CARE FOR IMMIGRANTS?

The language barrier is a particular problem for prenatal care. One in eight prenatal patients at the health department does not speak English as their primary language. Insurance companies require that translators pass rigorous examinations to demonstrate proficiency.

The Green River District Health Department employs seven part-time translators. The health department will also help pay for telephone translation services used in private medical practices.

## IS THERE A SHORTAGE OF OBSTETRICIANS IN OWENSBORO-DAVISS COUNTY?

According to an August 2005 report, 12 obstetricians practiced in Daviess County. This compared with 16 in McCracken County (Paducah), 18 in Warren County (Bowling Green) and 63 in Fayette County (Lexington).

Officials now report that there are currently eight practicing obstetricians in Daviess County. This reduction may have resulted from retirements and decisions of several obstetricians-gynecologists to discontinue delivering babies. According to some, this is due to the high cost of medical liability insurance.

### BIRTH DATA (2003) Daviess County

Number of live births	1,356
Crude birth rate (per thousand)	14.7
Infant deaths	9
Low birth weight	109
Births to single unmarried women	501
Births to mothers under 18	58

Source: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2003-Vital Reports <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/vital/2003vitalreports.htm>

## EXAMINING OPTIONS

How should our community respond to this challenge? Is there a more effective and compassionate way for us to meet this need? We examine five strategic options:

1. Give the current referral system time to work
2. Re-establish the midwife program with health department
3. Hire an obstetrician at the health department
4. Advocate for policy changes
5. Recruit more obstetricians

# Framing the Issue: Prenatal care for the poor

**1. GIVE THE CURRENT REFERRAL SYSTEM TIME TO WORK** This option suggests that the recent gesture by local obstetricians deserves a chance to succeed. By participating equitably, they can absorb the caseload of pregnant women who are covered by Medicaid and those who are uninsured and unable to pay.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This is a good faith offer on the part of the obstetricians.</li> <li>■ Health department officials have expressed their support for this option.</li> <li>■ This is the best way to ensure a continuum of care for pregnant women through delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ There are not enough obstetricians to absorb this number of patients on a continuing basis; we should plan now for a better way.</li> <li>■ Medicaid patients and uninsured pregnant women will be more comfortable in a health department setting.</li> <li>■ Obstetricians in private practice may agree to take these patients, but if extra payments are required in addition to the reimbursements offered by the health department, patients will be unable to pay and will have no other alternative for care.</li> </ul>

**2. RE-ESTABLISH THE MIDWIFE PROGRAM WITH HEALTH DEPARTMENT** This option suggests that we should work through concerns that obstetricians have with the midwife program and restore medical oversight so the health department midwife program can be re-established.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The midwife program was popular, safe and cost-effective. Midwives are caring professionals who take time with patients.</li> <li>■ Many communities rely on trained midwives for deliveries as well as prenatal care. If we are willing to transfer our patients to supervised midwives in Madisonville, we can find a way to do that here at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Midwives require medical supervision that is impractical for our small number of obstetricians to provide.</li> <li>■ Without proper supervision, there are increased liability issues of concern to insurance carriers and state regulators.</li> </ul>

**3. HIRE AN OBSTETRICIAN AT THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT** This option suggests that a staff obstetrician at the health department could provide direct services and medical oversight for midwives to restore the prenatal public service.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This option would eliminate the need for local obstetricians to provide medical oversight.</li> <li>■ On-site services and supervision would eliminate liability concerns.</li> <li>■ The position could be funded by Owensboro Medical Health System or the county health tax. This should be as much or more of a priority than facility expansion or biotechnology enterprises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The health department should not be in the service delivery business; referring patients to private providers is better.</li> <li>■ A private obstetrics practice in the health department would be expensive to establish and subsidize. The public does not support increased health taxes.</li> <li>■ A competing obstetrician at the health department would not be welcomed by local colleagues. It would be difficult to secure the back-up support needed for late night and weekend deliveries, vacations, etc.</li> </ul>

**4. ADVOCATE FOR POLICY CHANGES** This option suggests that the key to increased physician care for the poor is to increase Medicaid reimbursements and reduce medical liability insurance premiums.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Obstetricians should not be expected to pay exorbitant liability insurance premiums – much more than other states.</li> <li>■ In Kentucky, we need a cap on lawsuit awards like they have in Indiana to lower liability awards.</li> <li>■ Costs of running private medical practices continue to increase while there are unfair expectations that physicians should absorb more indigent care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This is much more than a local issue; we should focus on local strategies that can make a difference.</li> <li>■ Caps on individual awards are unfair to consumers; we need to look at other ways to lower liability costs.</li> <li>■ Physicians are compensated very well and can absorb a reasonable amount of charity and reduced-fee care into their practice.</li> </ul>

**5. RECRUIT MORE OBSTETRICIANS** This option suggests that if we had more obstetricians in Daviess County, the care of Medicaid and uninsured patients would be more manageable.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We can step up recruiting and perhaps offer incentives to attract more obstetricians to our community</li> <li>■ Most obstetricians earn exceptional incomes and should be attracted to Owensboro's high quality of life and growing regional medical position.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Kentucky's medical liability premiums are substantially higher than many other states and until that changes, obstetricians who want to practice in our area are more likely to set up shop in Indiana.</li> <li>■ Owensboro-Daviess County has been experiencing stagnant growth for many years. We are not attracting well-educated young people, which is essential for a thriving obstetrics practice.</li> </ul>

# Framing the Issue: Prenatal care for the poor

## LEARN MORE

### American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology

<http://www.acog.org/from%5FHome/proxy/>

### Sandy Cleveland

Maternity Service Coordinator  
Department of Public Health  
Commonwealth of Kentucky  
502/564-2154

### Lee Denham

Executive Director  
Green River District Health  
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### Craig Slater, M.D., MBA

Senior Vice President of Medical Staff  
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##### Walton R. Allen, D.M.D.

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### Henderson County

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##### Eric Ervin, M.D.

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#### Joe K. Howell, P.E.

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### Daviess County Medical Society

#### Roger Humphrey, M.D., F.A.C.S.

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### Local Obstetricians

#### Christine Briones, M.D.

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Owensboro, Ky. 42303  
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#### Stuart Augenstein

#### Alan Braden

#### Bob Carper

#### Bill Chandler

#### George Henderson

#### Ron Johnson, MD

#### Ann Kincheloe

#### Tom Maddox, MD

#### Albert Mercer, MD

#### Billy Joe Miles

#### Frederic Park, MD

#### Gerald Poynter

#### G. Ted Smith

#### Edward C. Wathen

### City of Owensboro

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Owensboro, Kentucky 42303

#### Mayor Tom Watson

270/687-8561  
mayor@owensboro.org

#### Commissioner Candance Brake

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#### Commissioner Charlie Castlen

270/685-8563  
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#### Commissioner Jim Glenn

270/685-8564  
glennjh@owensboro.org

#### Commissioner Ron Payne

270/685-8566  
paynerl@owensboro.org

#### City Manager Bob Whitmer

270/687-8558  
whitmerri@owensboro.org

### Daviess County Fiscal Court

#### Daviess County Courthouse

P.O. Box 1716  
Owensboro, Kentucky 42302  
270/685-8424

#### County Judge-Executive Reid Haire

rhaire@daviessky.org

#### Commissioner Jim Lambert

jlambert@daviessky.org

#### Commissioner Bruce Kunze

bkunze@daviessky.org

#### Commissioner Mike Riney

mriney@daviessky.org

## GET INVOLVED

### Citizens Health Care Advocates

401 Frederica Street

B-203

Owensboro, Ky. 42301

270/685-2652

Don Crask, Chair

Beverly Mills, Project Manager (beverly.mills@plfo.org)

### Kentucky Coalition of Nurse

#### Practitioners and Nurse Midwives

1017 Ash Street

Louisville, KY 40217

502/333-0076

admin@kcnpmn.org

## SOURCES

Blackburn, David "Agency phasing out prenatal services," *Messenger-Inquirer*, Sept. 20, 2006

Blackburn, David "State, local funds could be used for prenatal care," *Messenger-Inquirer*, Oct. 14, 2006

Denham, Lee, Executive Director, Green River Health Department

Kentucky Youth Advocates ([www.kyouth.org](http://www.kyouth.org)), Kentucky KIDS COUNT 2005

Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2003-Vital Reports

U.S. Census Bureau ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) Poverty Thresholds 2005



# Citizens Speak...

## LEADERS RESPOND

### **“Waging a Living” Forum**

Approximately 100 people participated in the “Waging a Living” forum on August 28 at the Settle Memorial United Methodist Church annex. The forum was organized by the Coalition for the Poor in conjunction with numerous community organizations.

Following a presentation of a PBS documentary, participants examined separate case studies of low-wage earners struggling to make ends meet: a security guard, a single mother and full-time college student, and a nursing assistant. In small group discussions, forum participants explored individual and systemic responsibilities, challenges and possible solutions to improve conditions and prospects for these struggling individuals and families.

#### **MOST OF THE FORUM PARTICIPANTS CONCLUDED...**

- that our community has many people whose situations mirror the case studies featured in the documentary.
- that we do not have a comprehensive strategic plan to help working low and moderate income families deal with the challenges facing them.
- that despite the fact that state and federal governments devote significant funds to meet these needs, local agencies do not have the resources they need.
- that our economy, even though growing at a 3.5 to 4.0 percent rate, has not improved the standard of living for many citizens. Many people feel they are falling farther behind and are one health crisis away from bankruptcy.

More than two dozen strategies were suggested or supported. Forty-five participants expressed an interest in working on federal or state policy or local initiatives.

Even though there is not an agreement on how to achieve goals, acknowledgement of the problem by elected officials, community leaders and the public represents important progress.

Forum results were sent to forum participants, elected officials, social and health care agency officials, community leaders and the media.

### **Forum on Coal-Burning Power Plants**

Results of the questionnaire completed by participants at the August 22 forum on coal-fired power plants (summarized in our September edition) were sent to officials with state regulatory agencies, elected officials, utility executives, business and economic development specialists, union leaders, environmental science researchers, media and others.

As of this printing, there have been no responses.

### **Immigration Forum: Participants favor holding off on reform until legislative flaws can be corrected**

Approximately 40 people attended the Unity Coalition’s September 21 forum on proposed immigration reform legislation. The forum featured a debate between Todd Inman (representing the U.S. House of Representatives proposal) and Hervey Howell (representing the Senate version). Following the debate, forum participants engaged in

small group discussions and were asked to reach a compromise as if they were members of a joint House-Senate Conference Committee.

#### **DISCUSSIONS AT FIVE TABLES RESULTED IN THE FOLLOWING:**

Sixty percent said that this country’s immigration problem is extremely serious.

Sixty percent said that it is somewhat serious for Congress to solve the problem of illegal immigration this year.

Eighty percent favor legislation that would:

- provide resources to greatly increase border security
- impose much tougher penalties on employers who hire illegal workers
- allow additional foreign workers to come to the U.S. for a temporary period
- provide temporary workers with a multi-year path to earned citizenship

Sixty percent were unsure if they would be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who supports this legislation

Fifty percent were unsure if they would support or oppose legislation to:

- tighten the border
- put tougher penalties on employers and workers who violate immigration laws
- create or expand guest worker programs

All said that it is a good idea not to pass immigration reform this year because the major proposals have too many flaws and Congress needs more time to get it right.

### **Youth share ideas at riverfront forum**

Eleven local youth participated in a forum on the downtown riverfront on July 20 at the Public Life Foundation. Following a review of the proposed Riverfront Master Plan, participants shared impressions about the private sector additions that would effectively complement the public sector investments included in the master plan.

Recommendations included quality restaurants with river views, specialty retail shops (bakeries, coffee shops, candy stores, ice cream parlors, flower shops, and clothing stores) and an entertainment complex (bowling alley, movie theater, nightclubs, indoor go-kart track, and laser tag).

The youth expressed concern over the appearance of downtown. They support architectural standards and new buildings to be consistent with historic buildings. They want downtown Owensboro to be unique, with features such as cobblestone streets and period light fixtures. And they encourage plans to provide for year round attractions.

A summary of the forum was sent to local elected officials, riverfront planners and designers. As a result, Owensboro City Manager Bob Whitmer invited Sarah Wood, forum moderator, to serve on the citizen advisory committee for the riverfront.



# NOVEMBER/DECEMBER Public AGENDA

Meetings, hearings, and forums open to the public. Please contact us if your organization would like its events listed by calling 685-2652 or sending an email to info@plfo.org. (Meetings are subject to change.)

## Important Upcoming Public Meetings

### NOVEMBER

**9 Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)**  
5:30 p.m.  
Speaker: Michael Scherm, M.D.  
"Colon Cancer Prevention and Treatment"  
Green River District Health Dept.  
Bedford Walker Community Room

**13 Prenatal Care Forum**  
5:30 p.m.  
Green River District Health Dept.  
Bedford Walker Community Room

**16 PRIDE Annual Meeting**  
5:30 p.m.  
Presentation of Annual Beautification Awards  
Theatre Workshop of Owensboro  
407 West Fifth Street

**16 Owensboro Area World Affairs Council**  
7:00 p.m.  
Organization of American Historians  
Distinguished Lecturer  
Lloyd Ray Gardner, Rutgers University

"Vietnam and Iraq: A Failure of Intelligence?"  
Kentucky Wesleyan College  
Tapscott Chapel

**30 PRIDE and Western Kentucky Botanical Garden**  
Soup Day for Kids, Goodfellows Club benefit  
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Settle Memorial United Methodist Church  
ROC Room

### DECEMBER

**7 Goodfellows Club**  
Community "Soup Day for Kids"  
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Third Baptist Church  
Fireside Room  
527 Allen Street

**14 Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)**  
5:30 p.m.  
Program: TBA  
Green River District Health Dept.  
Bedford Walker Community Room

## Regularly Scheduled Public Meetings

*Meeting Dates and Times Subject to Change*

**Citizens Health Care Advocates**  
Second Thursday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
GRDHD, Bedford-Walker Community Room

**Daviess County Board of Education**  
Third Thursday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
1622 Southeastern Parkway

**Daviess County Fiscal Court**  
First and Third Thursday each month  
4:00 p.m.  
Daviess County Courthouse

**Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce "Rooster Booster" Breakfast**  
First Thursday each month  
7:30 a.m.  
Executive Inn

**Green River Health Council**  
Second Tuesday every other month (Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec)  
10:00 a.m.  
GRADD

### Neighborhood Alliance Meetings

**Apollo Area Alliance**  
Fourth Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Apollo Heights Baptist Church.

**Audubon Bon Harbor Area Alliance**  
Second Monday each month  
6:30 p.m.  
Audubon Church of the Nazarene

**Dogwood Azalea Neighborhood Alliance**  
Third Thursday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Daviess County Public Library

**Dugan Best Neighborhood Alliance**  
Fourth Tuesday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
Dugan Best Recreation Center

**Hillcrest Area Alliance**  
Second Tuesday each month  
6:30 p.m.  
Daviess County High School Media Center

*continued on pg. 20*

## The TRACKER

DATA OF INTEREST



Compiled by  
Chad M. Gesser

### RELIGION, ETHICS AND POLITICS: WHAT DO AMERICANS REALLY BELIEVE?

- Seventy-five percent of U.S. citizens believe that religion is a significant cause of global conflicts and wars.
- Sixty-seven percent of the U.S. population sees the U.S. as a "Christian" nation.
- Americans are evenly split on whether or not churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship should express views on issues of public policy.
- Nearly 30 percent of moderate-liberal Republicans believe the Bible should be a more important influence on U.S. law than the peoples' will. Thirty-six percent of conservative-moderate Democrats believe the same.
- More than 70 percent of Americans believe that liberals have gone too far in keeping religion out of schools and the government.
- More than 90 percent of Americans who attend religious services indicate that their clergy speaks on issues associated with hunger and poverty. More than 50 percent indicate their clergy speaks on laws associated with homosexual behavior.
- Approximately 60 percent of Catholics and Protestants believe in evolution. Approximately 80 percent believe in scientific evidence indicating global warming.
- More than half of the U.S. population supports strong U.S. policy to protect the natural environment.
- Approximately 55 percent oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry. Approximately 55 percent of Americans support allowing homosexual couples to enter into legal agreements that would give them many of the same rights as married couples.
- More than 65 percent of Americans believe we as a nation need to find a middle ground on abortion.
- Approximately 10 percent of Americans believe that abortion should never be permitted.
- Americans believe two-to-one that human embryos should be used for scientific research to advance human life rather than be destroyed.



# Citizen Action UPDATE

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

Margaret Mead

To submit updates on citizen action: 685-2652 or [info@plfo.org](mailto:info@plfo.org).

## Owensboro-Daviess County Asset Building Coalition

Contact: Keith Sanders (685-5707, [keithsanders@omuonline.net](mailto:keithsanders@omuonline.net))

- Making plans for an expanded program in 2007.
- Recruiting volunteers to help low-income people prepare tax returns and qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Developing financial literacy programs.

## Bring Back Baseball Committee

**Bruce Brubaker, chair**  
[bbrubaker@champion-ford.com](mailto:bbrubaker@champion-ford.com)

- Sharing information about the group's proposal (stadium, Frontier League franchise) with community groups and political candidates.
- Recent endorsements include: Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Owensboro, Tourist Commission.
- Tracking state government legislation concerning tax increment financing.

## Citizens Committee on Education

**Marianne Smith Edge, co-chair**  
[msedge@smithedge.com](mailto:msedge@smithedge.com)  
**Forrest Roberts, co-chair**  
[robrook@adelphia.net](mailto:robrook@adelphia.net)

- Supporting the Higher Education Advocacy Group to facilitate increased local opportunities in undergraduate and graduate education.
- Supporting "The Learning Community" initiative that seeks to instill a higher value of education and lifelong learning into the fabric of community life.
- Tracking city-county school issues, dropout rates and more.

## Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)

**Don Crask, chair**  
[donald.crask@ky.gov](mailto:donald.crask@ky.gov)  
[www.CHCA.US](http://www.CHCA.US)

Meetings: Second Thursday of each month, 5:30 p.m., Green River District Health Department, Bedford Walker Community Room

- Continuing monthly programs on relevant topics and issues
- Tracking "Five Fields of Focus" for 2006:
  - access to health care
  - healthy lifestyles
  - governmental affairs
  - health care costs
  - organizational development
- CHCA now has 120 members and 574 attendees and participants at meetings
- Meetings are broadcast on OCTV

## Coalition for the Poor

**Nancy Keeton, Keith Sanders, and Sharon Sharp (Steering Committee)**

c/o Public Life Foundation, 401 Frederica Street, B203, Owensboro, KY 42301 (685-2652)  
Next Meeting: November 28, noon, First Christian Church

- Conducted an August 29 community forum around the broadcast of the PBS documentary, *Waging a Living*.
- Featured Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, on issues and state legislation affecting youth and families.
- Building a network of citizens who are concerned about the plight of the poor.
- Sharing information and concerns regarding the impact that government social program cuts have on the poor.
- Interested in leadership development programs that empower the poor.

## Owensboro-Daviess County Dental Task Force

Contact: Rodney Berry ([rodney.berry@plfo.org](mailto:rodney.berry@plfo.org), 685-2652)

- Applied for a grant to retain the University of Kentucky Center for Health Management and Research to assist the task force and community organizations in developing an effective model for meeting the dental needs of disadvantaged youth: school-based (Foust model), clinic, etc.

## Goodfellows Club

**Bruce Kunze, president**  
[bkunze1@aol.com](mailto:bkunze1@aol.com)

- Planning community-wide "Soup Day for Kids" and promoting "soup days" at local workplaces.
- Planning 2006 "Roll Call" campaign.
- Hosted a successful benefit tennis tournament (June 16-18); partnered with Luke Woodward Memorial Tournament.
- Participating in task force on youth dental needs.
- Recently named as a beneficiary in a will.
- Providing more than 1,000 children with winter coats, shoes, clothing and emergency assistance each year.

## Owensboro Area World Affairs Council

**Marc Maltby, Ph.D., president**  
[marc.maltby@kctcs.edu](mailto:marc.maltby@kctcs.edu)

- Planning 2007 Spring programs.
- Recent programs: Leonard Pitts, syndicated columnist; John Stempel, senior professor and former director of the University of Kentucky Patterson School of Diplomacy; George Russell, international elections consultant for the U.S. State Department, viewing and discussion of internationally acclaimed film "Paradise Now,"

visiting Chinese professors Aiming Liu and Baiyi Liu; Lloyd Gardner, history professor, Rutgers University.

## Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance

**Contact: Robin Cooper**  
[cooperrw@owensboro.org](mailto:cooperrw@owensboro.org)

- Reviewed Germantown Park redevelopment proposal
- Conducting leadership training program through a Public Life Foundation partnership.
- Strengthening alliances, recruiting members, sharing information, and developing programs to improve neighborhoods.

## PRIDE of Owensboro-Daviess County

**Donna Risley, president**  
[drisley@visitowensboro.com](mailto:drisley@visitowensboro.com)  
[www.prideodcky.org](http://www.prideodcky.org)

- Reviewing nominations for 2006 Annual Beautification Awards to be presented at the annual meeting November 16.
- Developing cost estimates for the master plan for enhanced community entrances from the Natcher Bridge and West Parrish Avenue from the airport.
- Held a follow-up forum on the riverwalk proposal to English Park.
- Committees active in areas of beautification, public projects, architecture, and more.

## Unity Coalition

**Hervey Howell, president**  
[hervey@myway.com](mailto:hervey@myway.com)

- Planning third immigration forum January 2007
- Held a follow-up forum on immigration on September 21.
- Held a public forum on immigration issues on July 11.
- Presented a "Fair Housing" forum on February 16.

# Public AGENDA, cont.

## Midtown East Neighborhood Alliance

First Thursday each month  
5:00 p.m.  
Buena Vista Baptist Church

## Northwest Neighborhood Alliance

Fourth Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Foust Elementary School Media Center

## Old Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance

Second Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Wendell Foster Center Administration Building Boardroom

## Seven Hills Neighborhood Alliance

First Thursday each month  
7:00 p.m.  
Trinity United Methodist Church

## Shifley-York Neighborhood Alliance

Second Tuesday each month  
5:30 p.m.  
Lewis Lane Baptist Church

## Southeast Alliance

Second Thursday each month  
6:30 p.m.  
Newton Parrish Elementary School

## Wesleyan-Shawnee Neighborhood Alliance

Fourth Tuesday each month  
6 p.m.  
Kentucky Wesleyan College, Winchester Center

## Owensboro Board of Education

Fourth Thursday each month  
4:30 p.m.  
Boardroom

## Owensboro City Commission

First and Third Tuesday each month  
5:00 p.m.  
City Hall

## Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport

Third Monday of each month  
4:30 p.m.  
Airport terminal building conference room

## Owensboro Historic Preservation Board & Downtown Design Review Commission

Fourth Wednesday each month  
5:00 p.m.  
City Hall

## Owensboro Housing Authority

Fourth Thursday each month  
11:30 a.m.  
2161 E. 19th St.

## Owensboro Metropolitan Board of Adjustment

First Thursday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
City Hall

## Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission

Second Thursday each month  
6:00 p.m.  
City Hall

## Owensboro Riverport Authority

Fourth Friday each month  
12:00 p.m.  
1771 River Road

## Owensboro Utility Commission

Third Thursday each month  
4:00 p.m.  
2070 Tamarack Rd., Third floor board room

## Preservation Alliance of Owensboro-Daviess County, Inc.

First Friday every other month (Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec)  
12:00 p.m.  
Campbell Club

## RWRA

Third Monday each month (except January, Fourth Monday)  
3:30 p.m.  
RWRA, 1722 Pleasant Valley Road

## Tobacco Control Coalition

Fourth Wednesday each month  
11:30 a.m.  
GRDHD

## Tourism & Convention Bureau

Third Thursday each month  
7:45 a.m.  
215 E. Second St.

## ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

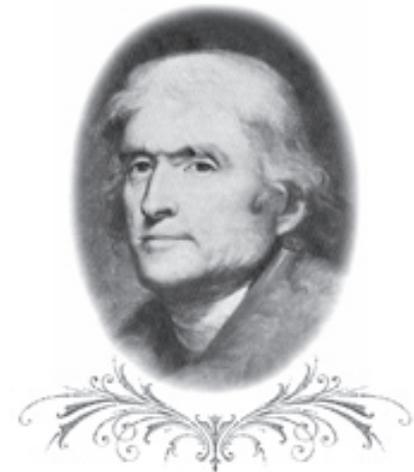
The *Public Life Advocate*, published bi-monthly, is committed to be a trusted resource of information and analysis of public concerns and community issues. The *Advocate* is a community-driven publication, grounded in a commitment to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

## ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, Inc. is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c) operating foundation (not a grant-making entity) founded in 1996 by John and Marjorie Hager. Mr. Hager is the former owner, editor, and publisher of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

The foundation fosters broad, meaningful citizen participation in community decisions and public policy. We believe that open, accessible, and trustful institutions are essential to an enlightened and engaged citizenry and the democratic process.

Foundation activities are driven by the importance that people attach to issues. We are committed to the people's agenda. To assist citizens in solving problems and seizing opportunities, we facilitate a process of information > deliberation > action.



*"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."*

*Thomas Jefferson*

## EDITOR'S NOTES

continued from page 3

- Is it so important to maximize our coal reserves that we remove mountaintops and destroy ecosystems? Do we want another coal-fired power plant in our backyard?
- Should we make sure we can provide prenatal services for poor pregnant women and dental care for children before we endorse costly hospital facility expansion?

We can bring stakeholders together to sit around the table and face up to community, institutional and systemic shortcomings. We can challenge them to look at a bigger picture, transcend their own interests, roll up their sleeves and discover common ground for the common good.

We can debunk the political strategists who could care less if we are informed, as long as we are convinced to heed their call and vote their way.

In so doing, leaders and project proponents will mobilize broader, more effective support and the direction and decisions of our community will be inherently better and wiser. ■