



2006

A YEAR IN REVIEW

Citizenship is not a spectator sport. - Robert Putnam



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About the Foundation

Benefactors

The Public Life Foundation was established by John and Marjorie Hager in 1996. The Hager family published Owensboro newspapers for three generations.

Endowment

\$8,285,647 (as of December 31, 2006)

Mission

The foundation promotes broad and meaningful citizen participation in community decisions and public policy.

Values

The foundation attempts to empower citizens from all walks of life through an open, just, and democratic process. The foundation promotes stewardship, volunteerism and a community that solves problems by overcoming divisions between the rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural, liberal and conservative.

Program

The foundation promotes a three-phased process of *information* (research, articles, issue briefs), *deliberation* (public forums, community dialogue), and *action* (support of citizen volunteers).

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A YEAR IN REVIEW



Every New Year introduces opportunities and underscores challenges. For civic participants, it is time to reassess issues: what our community has accomplished, where we fell short, how we might regroup and keep trying, and when we should move on.

Like spokes in a wheel of progress, a balanced approach keeps our rim steady and rolling forward for our community. Central challenges such as education and economic development must be balanced by sensitivity for the poor and marginalized among us. While many citizens and leaders want to make the unification of local governments a lone priority, we cannot ignore needs and opportunities in health care, downtown revitalization, tourism, social services, environment, community appearance, race-ethnic relations and other areas.

At the same time, leaders and participants must prioritize. In this year-end report, we not only compile our 2006 activities, we examine top issues and challenges facing our community. We also assess the status of public life: the degree to which citizens have had a broad and meaningful role in important community decisions and public policies, the degree to which organizations

and leaders have been open, transparent and accessible.

Our internal wheel of progress only gains momentum when concerned citizens help us keep things rolling.

- We extend a hearty thank you to subscribers, contributors, and editors of our publication, the *Public Life Advocate*. The New Year will bring some format changes to improve the timeliness and relevance of our published materials.
- We are grateful for the many citizens who listened, learned and participated in community dialogue through our deliberative forums, panel discussions, lectures and more.
- We especially appreciate the commitment of the leaders, members and supporters of citizen groups that we assist at the foundation. You have said “yes” to public service, made available your time and skills, and our community is better for it.

Thanks to all. Let’s keep moving forward in 2007.

Rodney Berry
President



By Rodney Berry

Health and Health Care

Big projects must not redirect priorities or drive up costs.

Stay true to the mission. Owensboro Medical Health System is touted as our community's primary economic engine. Certainly the impact of its proposed \$500 million state-of-the-art hospital is substantial: 140-acre campus, 800 new jobs over 10 years, 85 new physicians and cutting-edge cancer research through plant-based biotechnology. Amid the excitement, we urge hospital leaders to stay focused on the institution's core values and mission to "heal the sick and improve the health of the community" – that is, *all* of the community, including the 13,000 uninsured Daviess Countians, the 25,000 who will be uninsured at some point during the year, and the countless underinsured who delay care because of the high cost of prescription drugs, deductibles and co-pays.

Prudent use of existing facilities. The hospital's business plan will include the difficult task of deciding what to do with the existing facilities. Some new or recently remodeled facilities – cancer center, emergency room and others – may remain on the Parrish Avenue campus. Other space could be converted to an additional free clinic, nursing home, veteran's hospital and more.

High costs still characterize our local system. A few years ago, Daviess County teachers and state employees paid the highest insurance premiums in the state. Those disparities have since been leveled out, but the factors that caused the high premiums in the first place – high utilization and provider charges – still characterize our community and region. OMHS can point to reduced official charges, but only six percent of patients pay those rates; the rest pay through Medicaid, Medicare or unreleased negotiated fees with insurance companies. Anthem reports that it still costs 20 percent more to deliver a baby in Owensboro than in Louisville, yet cost savings was the rationale for the 1996 merger of Our Lady of Mercy and Owensboro-Daviess County Hospitals.

Primary care a priority. As OMHS expands and becomes even more of a regional anchor, it will attract most of the indigent patients from its growing service area. The OMHS emergency room is already the state's busiest. Forty-five percent of the care provided in the ER is non-emergency care, 45 percent is moderate/intermediate care, and only 10 percent are true emergencies. Since ER care is the most expensive form of care, OMHS must divert more of its non-emergency business to primary care physicians and clinics. It is encouraging that OMHS President/CEO Jeff Barber has acknowledged this as a priority.

Malpractice premiums affect physician recruitment. Physicians and those who recruit them typically compare the cost of medical liability insurance in Kentucky with the

state of Indiana and conclude that high premiums are the culprit for our physician shortage. However, Indiana's average malpractice claims are 25 percent higher than in Kentucky. Consequently, citizens and legislators are torn over whether the solution is tort reform or more insurance regulation. Since both sides can present convincing data, perhaps there is a need for some combination of the two.

Sharing the burden of charity care. OMHS has been a generous participant in the DC-CAP Program, a mechanism that establishes a medical home to the uninsured and equitably distributes and tracks charity care among local physicians. The program has attracted 91 physicians. Despite only enrolling 116 patients, nearly a million dollars in services were donated in 2006. Every effort should be made to attract more physicians so the program can be expanded.

Pre-natal care for the poor is threatened. In October, the Green River District Health Department eliminated its pre-natal care program because local obstetricians would no longer provide medical oversight for midwives. The 40-50 new pregnant patients who turn to the health department each month for prenatal services have been placed with the four local obstetricians who have agreed to take them. It is only a matter of time when these doctors will be unable to absorb this additional patient load, even though the health department is offering Medicaid-level reimbursements. We need a community plan to protect the health of these mothers and their babies.

Youth dental needs warrant community action. Approximately 10 patients per day are turning to the OMHS emergency room for dental care. More than half of our county's disadvantaged youth do not have a family dentist, and only six of our 28 public schools offer dental screenings. Increased education and prevention, more school-based programs and the addition of a dentist at the health department are among the steps that warrant community support.

Smoking ordinance has limitations. It was encouraging to see city and county officials enact an ordinance to restrict smoking in public places in the 2006 election year. Citizen advocates relentlessly presented surveys and the latest research despite attempts to intimidate by raucous opposition.



Health and Health Care (continued)

However, the adopted ordinance was not a comprehensive one; establishments that only serve adults are exempt. It is unfortunate that the vast majority of citizens who do not wish to subject themselves to cigarette smoke have fewer choices when it comes to bars, night clubs and restaurants with bars.

Behaviors can be changed. No health service strategy can make as much impact as widespread lifestyle changes:

reduced smoking, increased physical activities and healthier diets. For several years, the citizen group Healthy Horizons has been promoting and sharing ways in which progress has been made in workplaces, schools, churches, senior citizen facilities and programs, youth and community centers, neighborhoods and more. This kind of public education and collaboration is important, effective and deserves community support.

Education

Time to get serious.

Local initiatives warrant strong response from WKU.

The release of the Citizens Committee on Education report on higher education was a wake-up call for our community. Only 14 percent of the Daviess County workforce has bachelor degrees and we've seen a 12 percent decrease in our college educated workforce in five years. We rank last among a dozen benchmark communities.

In response, Daviess County Judge-Executive Reid Haire recently proposed that county government acquire property near Owensboro Community and Technical College for a Western Kentucky University campus for junior and senior year courses and degree programs.

Officials hope to divert \$12 million from the second phase of the Advanced Technology Center that had been earmarked for WKU facilities. The county is prepared to borrow an additional \$6 million to construct what WKU will need to bring in programs to reverse these trends. We must insist that WKU follow through with distinctive programs, full-time faculty, employer partnerships, applied research and more.

Local colleges must flourish. Meanwhile, we must value and support our two-year community-technical college and private liberal arts institutions that attract quality students to our community – many of whom remain in Owensboro-Daviess County following graduation.

Our community ranks well in producing associate degree graduates through Owensboro Community and Technical College, which enrolls nearly 3,700 students. OCTC has also conducted 4,000 work skill assessments for area employers. Phase two of the Advanced Technology Center is expected to be authorized during the 2007 Kentucky General Assembly. The ATC will include a business incubator program.

Collegiate High School, an OCTC-based alternative school and the only one of its type in Kentucky, is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. However, the program must attract 100-150 additional students in 2007, including students from Daviess County public schools, if it expects to sustain this funding source.

For the fall 2006 semester, Kentucky Wesleyan College reported a 28 percent enrollment increase to 968 students,

the largest in 39 years. A new science building opened, the football stadium was enlarged and the college purchased nearby properties for a chapel, theater, alumni center and more. Bullish college leaders are also exploring the feasibility of a pharmacy school.

Brescia University serves approximately 700 students through traditional and weekend programs. Masters degrees in Curriculum-Instruction and Management are also offered, and the university partners with the prestigious University of Louisville Kent School of Social Work.

These higher education institutions and initiatives must be assiduously supported by our community. On a parallel track, we must continue to fight for our fair share of state higher education dollars.

School systems endure cultural challenges. Local K-12 school systems continue to rank well statewide and demonstrate innovation despite significant at-risk student populations. There is continuing concern about dropout rates and the need to instill a stronger cultural value of education and lifelong learning in the fabric of community life. The Learning Community initiative is a good faith effort to address that challenge; it deserves time to work its message into the public mind-set.

Inequities and misplaced priorities plague public schools. Meanwhile, Owensboro and Daviess County public school officials ignore the need to examine the potential of a more efficient, equitable consolidated district. New schools are built in the county as city schools are closed. City



Education (continued)

school taxes are 35 percent higher than taxes in the county. For decades, nearly all the affluent residential, commercial and industrial investments strengthened the county school tax base exclusively, while the city system has absorbed a greater burden of educating poor, minority and special needs students. Schools such as Foust or Estes Elementary cannot afford to send students on field trips, while county schools acquire laptop computers for their students. To enhance its image and appeal, the city schools respond by constructing state-of-the-art athletic facilities.

Modified library project moves forward. A new Daviess County Public Library is under construction and will offer improved visibility, additional parking, functional design improvements and room to grow. The library board, which sets its own district tax rate, scaled back the project when an increase in the tax that would have funded a more ambitious project was challenged by a group of citizens. The brouhaha over the library project points to the need for greater public understanding of the structure and authority of special tax districts.



Economic Development

New model deserves a chance

Education: our economic development strategy. The new Commerce Center is up and operating, led by two educators. That in itself sends an important message that our community's economic development strategy is really an education strategy. That in itself will bring us distinction and credibility.

Prospective employers are still interested in infrastructure, transportation, utility and tax rates, and incentives. But now their primary concern is the workforce – specifically, the educational attainment of the workforce.

The Commerce Center integrates the work of the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, Industrial Foundation, Downtown Redevelopment Authority, Tourist Commission, Planning and Zoning, and various workforce development programs.

This progressive, collaborative approach to community development should be given time to gain ground.

Acknowledge weaknesses, build upon strengths. Our business development shortcomings have been acknowl-

edged, and our determination and innovation are gratifying. We know of our interstate highway and air limitations, our drainage challenges. We lack a large pool of college graduates and a major university with a research dimension. We recently ranked last in job creation among benchmark communities. Entrepreneurs have been able to find more capital and start-up support in other places.

But – hallelujah – the tolls were finally removed from the Natcher and Audubon Parkways. A \$12 million 8,000 foot airport runway project will soon be completed and efforts are underway to expand air connections. Indiana's section of U.S. Highway 231 to I-64 is under construction. The east-side corridor connecting our by-pass with U.S. 60 will soon be under construction. And steps have been taken to upgrade the parkways to interstate standards.

The Riverport Authority plans to convert the former Green River Steel property to an industrial park. This should be of interest to employers that need river, rail and highway access. It will also clean up an eyesore at a pronounced community entrance. Let's hope that the Riverport's recent personnel problems will not slow its momentum.

Several business investments are worth noting: Owensboro Grain's \$22 million biodiesel plant, Toyotetsu expansion, Wax Works venture into specialty DVD distribution, and dozens of other employers that quietly expand and diversify.

Several initiatives are particularly promising: An EDC proposal for an applied research center involving OMHS, Kentucky Bioprocessing (previously Large Scale Biology) and Western Kentucky University; venture capital program; business mentoring; expanded work skills training and inventories, an incubator for entrepreneurs; and a redevelopment authority to facilitate downtown land acquisition and project packaging.

Such programs will require significant public and private funds to establish and sustain – investments in our community's future.

Riverfront improvements offer special opportunities.

Once boating facilities are relocated to English Park, a retaining wall will begin to frame the expansion of Smother's Park – the next phase of our \$50 million Riverfront Master Plan. Surely such an improvement will attract private development, but with such a public investment at stake, steps should be taken to plan, design and control the development

Economic Development (continued)

process for the benefit of the public.

Major projects warrant professional planning. There is no shortage of interest in community projects: arena, convention center, parking garage, minor league baseball stadium, ice rink, recreation center, water park and more. To ensure that these projects work well together and maximize the spin off potential of hotels, office, residential and retail projects, the vision needs to be crafted with extensive public input and implemented through a transparent planning and development process.

Redevelop where infrastructure already exists. Suburban

residential and commercial expansion continues unabatedly along Leitchfield Road, near Masonville, along and around south Frederica Street. If carefully planned, these investments will be economic and aesthetic enhancements. However, without comparable inner city projects, we run the risk of labeling the new suburban areas as affluent and the older neighborhoods as substandard and unsafe. To balance suburban sprawl (and the public facilities and services it requires), we must attract more market rate residential investment to the established areas surrounding downtown.

Social Issues

Offer help and hope

Low wage jobs require social safety net. Some analysts expect most of our growth to be associated with an expanding immigrant population and new jobs primarily in the low wage service sector. The ripple effect of an expected federal minimum wage increase will help, but there will still be a need for safety net programs in housing, nutrition, health care and other vital areas for those who perform important jobs for minimal pay.

This will be the third year that the Owensboro-Daviess County Asset Building Coalition offers financial literacy programs and free tax preparation for low-income families. In 2006, more than 100 volunteers served 1,200 families, resulting in \$1.4 million in refunds and nearly \$650,000 in earned income tax credits. This program deserves broad community support.

Substance abuse has devastating consequences. Drug and alcohol problems affect family life, child abuse, foster care, employability and more. Most of the criminal cases heard in Daviess district and circuit courts are drug and alcohol related. Tougher sentencing from drug convictions is testing the limits of our detention facilities.

Plans for a Boulware Mission expansion and new Light-house Recovery Center are important steps forward, and the Daviess County Drug Court has proved to be an effective and less costly alternative to incarceration. Officials also hope to establish a family court and child advocacy center. One fundamental shortcoming: Medicaid generally does not cover substance abuse treatment and medications are often unaffordable for the uninsured.

Our community must monitor these issues and agencies must work collaboratively if we are to make a difference in this area.

Reduce single parent families. Teen pregnancy is down, but more than 30 percent of babies in Kentucky are born to single mothers and about half of those live in poverty. Programs to promote responsible fatherhood and tougher enforcement of child support are steps in the right direction, but more extensive community education and accessible birth control will also reduce these numbers.

Other challenges. In the past decade, federal welfare reforms have removed many people from public assistance, but juggling education/job training, transportation and child care is often an unmanageable burden for the poor. Worthwhile programs and organizations, such as Building Stronger Families and the Neblett Center, have struggled to find operating support. There is a crying need for more responsible foster parents. And to reduce recidivism, we need to find better ways to offer hope and work opportunities to those released from detention centers.

Other resources. Our local Head Start program ranks among the best. Local school systems offer full-day kindergarten and training for staff to understand generational poverty. Several youth centers have new facilities. A new coalition is advocating on behalf of the poor.



Government Structure

Toward a better way

The people are interested. Owensboro Mayor Tom Watson made city-county government unification a key plank in his 2004 campaign platform and stands by that as his priority. He supported state legislation that more equitably assigns appointments to city-county charter commissions. He went along with a county-proposed task force that studied the issue for a year. And now he and other supporters commissioned a survey in which 94 percent of respondents said they would like to see the issue placed on the ballot for a public vote.

City and county governments must both act. Unfortunately, if the Daviess County Fiscal Court will not join with city government in adopting an ordinance, the initiative will not likely move forward. (A petition process offers another less effective option.)

Not a rush to judgment. Until a plan is developed, it is premature to come to judgment about a unification proposal. But in a democracy, the public should not have such an opportunity taken from them.

Genuine concerns and questions. There are legitimate points pro and con:

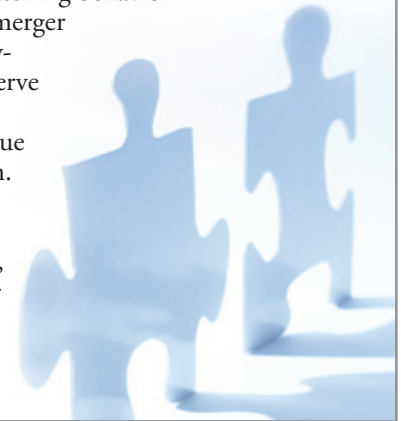
- Those opposed to unification may like our current structure. They may fear that their tax rates will increase to the level of those who live or work in the city. They may feel that they will have less representation in a combined system.
- Those in favor of unification may include city residents

who pay both city and county taxes. They may question whether they get enough value from double-taxation. They may wonder why we need to staff two departments – parks, streets, engineering, accounting, etc. – if one would do. They may sense that it is important for the community to speak with one voice.

People on both sides of the issues recognize that the current structure has shortcomings. They agree that a combined 911 system makes sense. They know we can do better when a fire rages and it is unclear which department should respond. They may be concerned when they learn the significant difference in police response times depending on where one lives.

A special opportunity. If we could start fresh and design a government structure for all of Daviess County, would it look anything like what we have today? Through the process provided for in the law, we have the capacity to do just that.

Let the dialogue begin. No one wants a repeat of the unruly rhetoric and threatening behavior that characterized the 1990 merger initiative. The citizens of Owensboro-Daviess County deserve an opportunity to engage in honest, open and civil dialogue based on reliable information. Let's make every attempt to remove speculation and misinformation from the debate, and let the people chart their future.



Tourism

Plan for the future

Hotel-convention facilities are inadequate. Tourism has been an important dimension of our local economy since the Executive Inn Rivermont was built more than three decades ago. Hotels, restaurants, retail stores, convenient-gas marts and others rely heavily on out of town visitors. The newest Executive Inn owners appear to be betting their future on a casino license. A recent fire gave them an opportunity to close more than 200 rooms. Their plans for a water park have been put on hold.

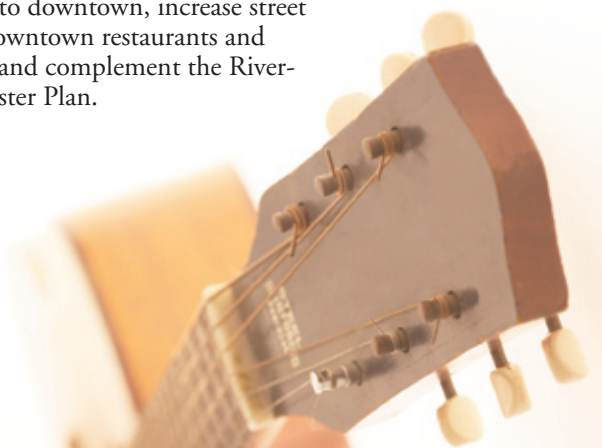
Meanwhile, the Owensboro-Daviess County Tourist Commission recently reported a disturbing number of dilapidated hotel properties and a critical shortage of rooms, affecting our ability to secure tournaments, conventions and other attractions.

Still a popular spot. Despite the hotel challenge, we have landed sports events, a major air show, an award winning bluegrass music festival (relocated to Yellow Creek Park), touring productions and more.

Planning facilities to attract events. The Tourist Commission should coordinate a tourism development plan that addresses facilities, events and attractions, conventions, busi-

ness travel and more. Perhaps we need to revisit the master plan of Ben Hawes State Park and possibilities with Josiah Henson and the Amos Riley Plantation. The International Bluegrass Music Museum's Internet-based radio show has enormous potential. Special events at RiverPark Center, such as the Mystery Writer's Festival, should be an important part of the plan. Conventions, festivals, sports and culture – and how we can stay competitive.

The plan should also examine the feasibility of a publicly owned multi-purpose convention center that can then attract private hotels on nearby sites. This could be a dramatic addition to downtown, increase street life for downtown restaurants and retailers, and complement the Riverfront Master Plan.



Amenities and Community Projects

A nicer place to call home

Quality of life. It means different things to different people. Some people enjoy sporting events and attractive venues to accommodate them. Others appreciate the arts or a bike ride through a park. From ice rinks to tennis facilities, festivals to public art, sidewalk cafes to a local music scene, one cannot devalue the importance of community amenities.

Competing cities are ahead of us. Moreover, we are competing with cities that beautify their medians, that have high architectural standards and bustling downtowns, that plant trees along their boulevards and wildflowers along their highways. Mountains and rivers, horse farms and historic buildings, parks and fountains accent communities and make them not like everywhere else – all of which forms an impression with business prospects, tourists, seniors looking for places to retire and college graduates considering where they might settle.

Things we can do. All this underscores the rationale behind the Riverfront Master Plan and PRIDE's goal to beautify our community's new entrance from the Natcher Bridge. It means we should place utilities underground whenever we can and place limits on billboards that otherwise will line ev-



ery boulevard. It means building an ice rink and completing the Greenbelt. It means that our next major public building will involve extensive design review. It means preserving the character and uniqueness of our historic buildings. It means shoring up our museums, symphony and RiverPark Center. It means offering our community its own minor league baseball team.

Generate excitement responsibly. This does not suggest that all this can be done at once or that community amenities should take precedence over human needs. But these enhancements will be enjoyed by people from all walks of life. Let's make a place for them.

Environment

Tough questions, higher standards

Much to monitor. Our air is certainly better since OMU installed scrubbers in 1995, but pollution tracking services give us mixed reviews today. Air quality is affected by other power plants in the region (including several nearby across the river), agriculture, automobile emissions and other factors. Environmentalists attempt to monitor power plant proposals, river and stream contaminants, mercury exposure, the impact of large scale hog and chicken production facilities and other concerns. They deserve our support and participation.

Do we draw the line? Nearby coal reserves and navigable rivers have made this area ideally suited for coal-fired power plants. Do we really want to be the hub of this industry?

And if that is inevitable, will we insist that the new plants use the latest technology and safety standards? Will we insist that the older, more dangerous and polluting plants be phased out as the new plants are built?

Is there a place for our community to express its concerns – if not outrage – for broader environmental issues that affect us all: global warming or mountaintop removal?

Local action. As for local initiatives, is it time to get serious about curbside recycling as have competitor cities? We enjoy and recognize the value of OMU's low electric rates, but that also puts us in a better position to set high emission standards. Will we be ahead of other cities and encourage homebuilders, developers and architects to use the latest "green" design techniques to reduce energy consumption, improve drainage and environmental quality.



Diversity

Citizens of the world

Diversity hits home. Things are changing in Owensboro-Daviess County. Our community may be more homogenous than most places, but it is easy to observe the increasing ethnic diversity that now characterizes us.

This is a good thing. We are better and wiser when we mix with and learn from other cultures, when we are reminded that we are citizens of the world. In recent years, Owensboro-Daviess County has attracted numerous immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, India, Africa, Asia and other areas.

International commerce opportunities. Several major employers in our community are owned by international interests (e.g., Swedish Match, Toyotetsu, Lipton/Unilever), others have plants overseas (e.g., MPD) or extensive international customers (e.g., Premium Allied Tool). International commerce offers unprecedented potential in a world in which the Internet has leveled the playing field, made education more accessible, and facilitated partnerships. Will our leaders identify niche strategies and seize these opportunities?

Community is responding. Increasing diversity presents challenges: language and cultural differences affect housing, education and health care. The Unity Coalition has examined immigration law, legislative proposals and housing issues. The First Presbyterian Church Multi-Cultural Festival, Sister Cities, Friendship Force, student

exchanges and other programs celebrate cultural diversity and promote good will. LaPlaza offers a focal point for fellowship and services for the Latino community. Important resources and programs to sustain.

Lingering minority challenges. Meanwhile, our African American minority falls short in terms of education, employment and income. A greater percentage of young black men drop out of school, serve jail time, and father a child without a sense of financial responsibility. This can change as black leaders, ministers, volunteers and the broader community coalesce, mentor and present alternatives.

Learning about the world. Another important dimension of changing international influences: the challenge to introduce our community to global issues. The Owensboro Area World Affairs Council is off to a solid start, partnering with local colleges to present diplomats, journalists, activists and others. OAWAC lectures, panel discussions and films will need a dependable source of support to sustain these valuable events.



Philanthropy

Love of community

A good year for giving. Let's hope that a contagious spirit of philanthropy builds upon what was done in 2006 with the Joni Berry gift (\$1,000,000) to RiverPark Center and the Impact 100 grant (\$150,000) to Grandma's Corner. If "Impact" can be sustained at that level, it will be equivalent to a \$3,000,000 endowment. Several capital and endowment campaigns are off to a good start, and the annual Goodfellows Christmas campaign reached the highest level ever.

Our Community Foundation continues to grow impressively. Bob Steele made a major grant to expand the Kentucky Wesleyan College – Owensboro Catholic High School football stadium. And Marjorie and John Hager established a \$500,000 endowment at Owensboro Community and Technical College to complement endowments at Kentucky Wesleyan College and those to establish the Public Life Foundation and Progeny Fund.

Charitable trusts and foundations are wonderful resources. The good work and contributions of the Gates and Brownie Young Scholarship Trust, Hager Educational Foundation, Marilyn and William Young Foundation, Yeager Trust,

Killian Foundation and others reflect a deep love and commitment to the Owensboro-Daviess County community.

Wealth transfer offers exciting potential. The next decade will be characterized by the largest transfer of wealth in history. We must encourage recipients of this wealth to devote a responsible percentage to local charities and philanthropic enterprises. By sharing needs, opportunities and estate planning techniques, we can attract resources that will make a powerful difference for the future of our community.



THE WORK OF THE FOUNDATION

Informing the Public

Published Articles

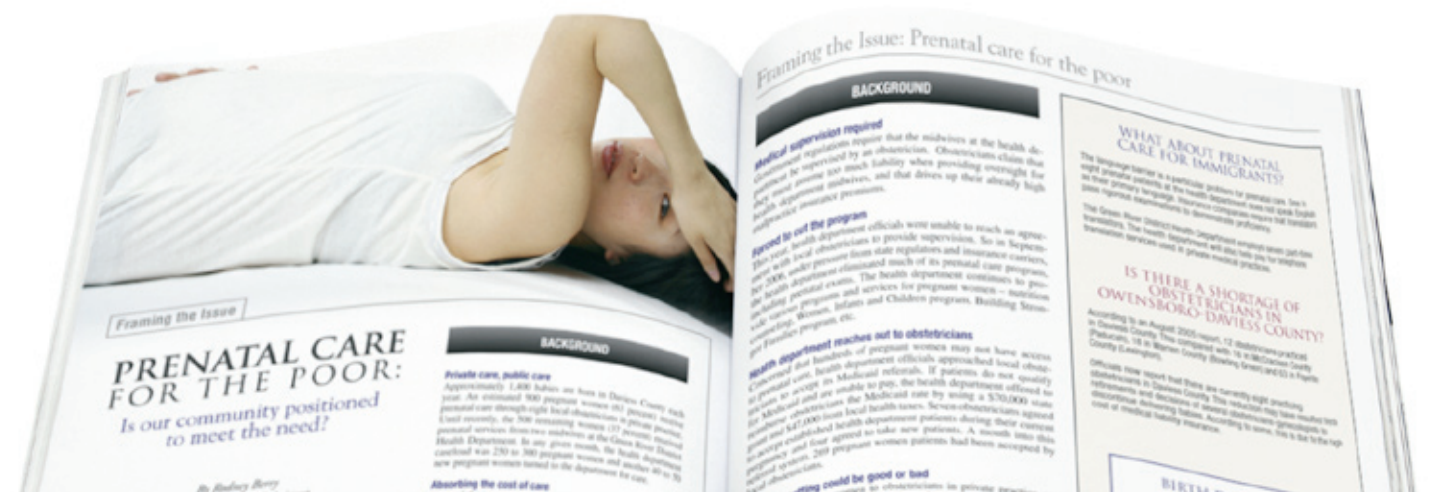
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Being gay in Owensboro	January 2006
Prepared for college, prepared for life?	March 2006
Raising wages: Helping the poor and ramifications of minimum wage mandates	March 2006
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Issue Briefs – Dialogue Guides

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Columns

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Our higher education challenge	May 2006
On the proposed riverwalk connecting downtown and English Park	July 2006
The public should shape private investment along the riverfront	September 2006
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Engaging the Public

Forums, Panels, Presentations and Dialogue

Results of select forums are available at www.plfo.org. Link under “Deliberation – Outcomes.”

January

The State Budget*

PLFO Public Forum

Willard Daggett

Educator
Hager Educational Foundation event

John Stempel

Patterson School of Diplomacy
University of Kentucky
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council event

Everything You Need to Know about Influenza

Citizens Health Care Advocates (panel discussion)

February

Heart Truth for Women

Robin Dennison, RN
Presentation to Citizens Health Care Advocates

George Russell

International Elections Consultant
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council event

Minority Housing Panel-Forum

Unity Coalition event

March

Tax Fairness Presentation*

PLFO Presentation
Owensboro Rotary Club

April

Jeff Barber, President/CEO

Owensboro Medical Health System
Presentation to Citizens Health Care Advocates

Citizen Diplomacy Summit

Statewide Town Hall Meeting

Leonard Pitts

Syndicated Columnist
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council event

Dr. David Hinson, Founder

Frankfort Dental Mission
Presentation to Citizens Health Care Advocates

Reproductive rights: Will America turn back the clock?

Dr. Paul Simmons
University of Louisville
Owensboro Pro-Choice event

May

Mercury is Rising

PLFO Public Forum

Stroke's Warning Signs

Citizens Health Care Advocates (panel discussion)

A Poverty of the Mind

PLFO Focus Group Discussion
Orlando Patterson essay on African American youth

June

Healthcare as a Moral Right

Bishop John McRaith
Presentation to Citizens Health Care Advocates

Jamie Vollmer

Educator
Owensboro Community and Technical College event

The Future of Downtown

Messenger-Inquirer Roundtable Discussion

Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative

GRADD Council on Aging Focus Group Discussion

July

Immigration Case Studies/Law

Public Forum
Unity Coalition

Youth Vision for Our Riverfront*

PLFO Focus Group

Kentucky Leadership Institute

Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky

August

Coal-Fired Power Plants*

PLFO Public Forum

Dental Care for Disadvantaged Youth*

PLFO Public Forum
Presented at Citizens Health Care Advocates meeting

Waging a Living

Film and Public Forum
Hager Foundation, other sponsors

International Forum

Kentucky United Nations Chapter

Riverfront Walkway Forums

City of Owensboro/ESDA design firm/PRIDE
August and September events

September

Drug Addiction Recovery Resources

Citizens Health Care Advocates (panel discussion)

Immigration Legislative Proposals

Debate-Discussion
Unity Coalition

Foundation for Healthy Kentucky

Annual Forum on Health Policy

Paradise Now (film and discussion)

Owensboro Area World Affairs Council event

October

Men's Health

Citizens Health Care Advocates (panel discussion)

The Chinese Experience: Myth or Reality?

Aiming Liu and Baiyi Liu
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council event

WOMENomics Forum

Owensboro Business and Professional Women

November

Community Options to Provide Prenatal Care for the Poor*

PLFO Public Forum

Colon Cancer Prevention and Treatment

Michael Scherm, M.D.
Citizens Health Care Advocates meeting

Vietnam and Iraq: A Failure of Intelligence?

Lloyd Gardner, Ph.D.
Owensboro Area World Affairs event

December

Open discussion on health care concerns

Citizens Health Care Advocates

Medicaid Forum

Kentucky Medicaid Monitoring Group
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Hager Foundation, other sponsors

KIDS Count Symposium

Kentucky Youth Advocates

2007 Legislative Briefing

Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

** Issue Brief – Dialogue Guide produced by the foundation*

Involving the Public

In 2006, the foundation supported the following volunteer action:

Citizens Committee on Education
Higher Education Advocacy Group
The Learning Community initiative
Citizens Health Care Advocates
Youth Dental Task Force
Prenatal Care Task Force

Coalition for the Poor
Goodfellows Club
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council
Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance
PRIDE
Unity Coalition

Impact/Highlights

- Smoking ordinance took effect with key support from CHCA
- WKU-Owensboro initiative gained momentum from Citizens Committee on Education report and leadership of Daviess County Fiscal Court
- The Learning Community initiative was launched
- CHCA received a grant to reduce the number of pregnant women who smoke
- PRIDE completed a master plan to enhance new community entrance from the Natcher Bridge
- PRIDE helped shape riverfront plan
- Task forces brought attention to prenatal care crisis and youth dental needs
- Unity Coalition examined issues affecting immigrants
- Owensboro Area World Affairs Council programs helped us recognize the relevance of global issues
- Hundreds of citizens engaged in dialogue and deliberation on important public issues



THE STATUS OF PUBLIC LIFE

We acknowledge several good faith efforts in 2006 to involve the public in important community decisions and policies. We also share what we perceive as shortcomings.

On the positive:

Riverfront Master Plan. City officials have gone well beyond the mandated public hearings in the planning and design of the Riverfront Master Plan. Sessions have not been without controversy, but voices from all constituencies have been heard and considered. The citizens group PRIDE and Riverfront Advisory Committee have facilitated such dialogue. Many decisions are yet to be made, and some choices may be difficult. We hope the public will not only have an opportunity to vote up or down on proposals, but through hands-on workshops, be given opportunities to roll up their sleeves and help craft and examine specific elements of the plan.

Citizen Access Board. The Daviess County Fiscal Court established a mechanism for public input through its Citizen Access Board. A step in the right direction, but dialogue with a hand-picked focus group does not have the same impact as open public forums that do not center on the views of a few.

Smoking ordinance. The smoking ordinance took effect

in 2006, and resentment lingered in certain circles. Several new candidates for fiscal court challenged incumbents and threatened to rescind the ordinance. The issue was sure to be an emotional one, but it could have been less divisive if there had been more of an opportunity for civil dialogue. There was considerable discussion at public hearings, measured in part by how many people in attendance represented a certain perspective. It would have been helpful to have more opportunities for citizens to learn about the latest research, listen to those who held a different perspective, and come to an informed judgment.

State legislative priorities. It is good that the Chamber of Commerce has seen the importance and taken the lead to establish legislative and project priorities for each session of the Kentucky General Assembly. Typically, officials and advocates have lobbied independently which gives Frankfort officials an excuse to deny funding until the “community gets its act together.” While we appreciate the Chamber, we also support a broader system of public participation that transcends business interests in establishing community priorities.

Concerns and shortcomings:

New hospital proposal. The largest project and most significant pending community investment that dwarfs all others: the proposal to build a new hospital. The OMHS Board of Directors has not taken formal action, but the public perceives that a decision essentially has been made to build a new \$500 million facility. Plans are being prepared; sites are being optioned. The rationale may be sound to build new rather than renovate, but any public dialogue will likely be seen as perfunctory.

OPS spending. Owensboro Public Schools has already used several million dollars of general fund resources on property acquisition and Shifley Park athletic facilities, thereby reducing resources for classroom instruction. The board is also using most if not all of its bonding capacity for a new arena, pool and other facilities on Frederica Street. While these priorities could be challenged, we are even more concerned about the limited public awareness of this action, its implications, and growing disparities that characterize city and county school systems – not the least of which is a 35 percent difference in school property taxes.

Community Conversations, Inc. CCI dissolved in 2006. This group is largely responsible for introducing the process of deliberative dialogue to Owensboro-Daviess County. We salute the leaders and volunteers who organized and conducted forums, trained moderators and expanded substantive citizen participation. Our community will be well served if those who gained experience through CCI urge our local officials and institutions to make dialogue and deliberation an accepted element of community decision making.

Unification Task Force fell short. The 10 citizens appointed by the City of Owensboro and Daviess County Fiscal Court released their report in March 2006 after a year examining various aspects of merged local governments. Green River Area Development District provided staff and research support. The task force report responded to 16 questions and made no recommendations. Meetings generally consisted of presentations from local officials or leaders from other communities who had experience with unification. The lack of public participation has been used as an indicator of a lack of public interest in merger. From our experience, we have found that citizens are most interested in the issues that drive consideration of unification: efficiency, tax fairness, leadership and more. While it was good to involve citizens in this study group, the meetings were not structured or promoted in such a way to attract the public or engage them in meaningful dialogue.

A spirit of openness and transparency. We encourage elected officials, appointed leaders of public commissions and tax districts, and leaders of nonprofit organizations that have a public mission to not only comply with legal requirements associated with open meetings and open records, but to embrace a spirit of openness and transparency.

Every meeting cannot and should not be open, but when business is conducted publicly, private interests are naturally subdued. Personal agendas are more difficult to orchestrate. The public and affected stakeholders better understand the rationale used in the decision.

Openness and transparency builds good will and trust. And decisions that come from it are inherently better.

