

PUBLIC LIFE FOUNDATION OF OWENSBORO



# Pushing THE PEOPLE'S Priorities

2008 ANNUAL REPORT  

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2009 PRIORITIES

# 2008: An emphasis on implementation

The civic euphoria that carried over into 2008 following the November 2007 “We the People” Town Meeting was gratifying and promising. Hundreds of town meeting participants stepped up to be part of the implementation of recommendations that came forth from the unprecedented civic assembly.

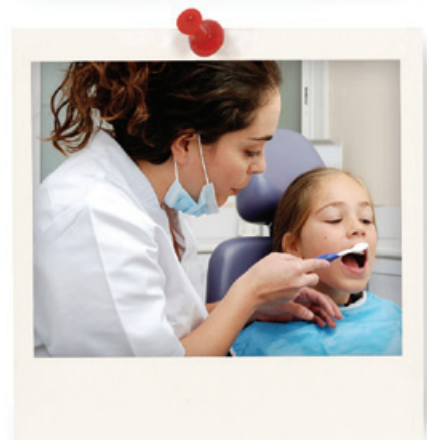
Since then, the “We the People” database has doubled to more than 1,200 and several ideas from the town meeting are now top citizen priorities: expanded recycling, openness and transparency in government, the transformation of Owensboro’s downtown and more. The closing of the Executive Inn heightened the sense of urgency to invest in our downtown and revive our convention industry.

A “We the People” Executive Board and Leadership Council were established. We secured an executive director. Quarterly “We the People” meetings attracted impressive crowds. Citizen groups, leaders and committees were established. Public access television covered events. Appearances were made to civic and school groups, radio and television talk shows. Newsletters, email blasts and blogs are connecting citizens.

Despite the shocking 2008 financial meltdown and the corresponding layoffs, devaluation of assets and borrowing power that accompany it, a bullish tone characterizes Owensboro-Daviess County. In addition to an ambitious riverfront and downtown master plan, leaders charge ahead with a new \$500 million hospital, a new campus for Western Kentucky University-Owensboro, a business accelerator, a new local government incentive policy, biotech partnerships and cancer research facilities, a dental clinic for low income youth and adults, several new elementary schools in the Daviess County district and a major athletic and fine arts addition to Owensboro High School.

As issues and opportunities arise, as public decisions and policies are considered, the foundation strives to be a resource for *information*, a facilitator of timely and substantive public *deliberation*, and an advocate for grass roots civic *action*.

**information → deliberation → action**



# Information

## 2008 Published Articles and Issue Briefs

Published articles, issue briefs and reports are archived on the foundation's website: [www.plfo.org](http://www.plfo.org).

### Citizen engagement and participation

- “We the People” Town Meeting underscores need for meaningful public participation in major community decisions
- Citizen initiative was catalyst for WKU project
- Updates on “We the People” groups
- Expanding “We the People” state-wide
- Public voice in public design

### Government and Taxation

- State shortfall
- 1990 merger debate: what was voted down
- Scarce state resources warrant public analysis and deliberation
- Tax disparities in Owensboro-Daviess County (PowerPoint for public forum)

### Downtown

- Re-examining the Peirce report: On downtown and the riverfront
- Community for the 21st century
- A Main Street for People (on the Second Street truck traffic problem)

### Openness and Transparency

- Let the sunshine in
- OMHS selectively soliciting public input

### Education

- OHS, Vick recognized
- Reflections on city-county school study
- Should school superintendents select principals?

### Community and Economic Development

- Regional coalescing
- Why the TIF failed
- Local government and land acquisition
- International Center
- Taking a look at community development challenges
- Bridge building and safe weight limits

### Environment

- Another power plant
- Drill Baby Drill!
- Curbside recycling should be available to all

### Health Care

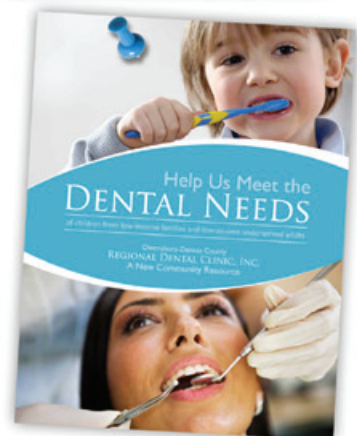
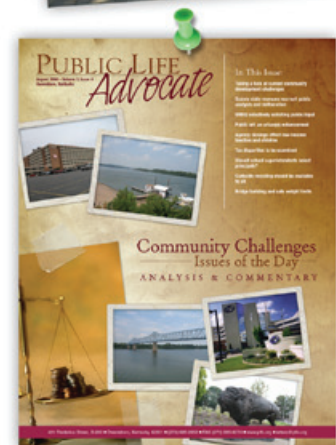
- Citizen task force spearheads dental clinic
- Kentucky health issues poll

### Justice and Social Issues

- Our exploding prison population
- Agency closings affect low-income families and children

### Arts

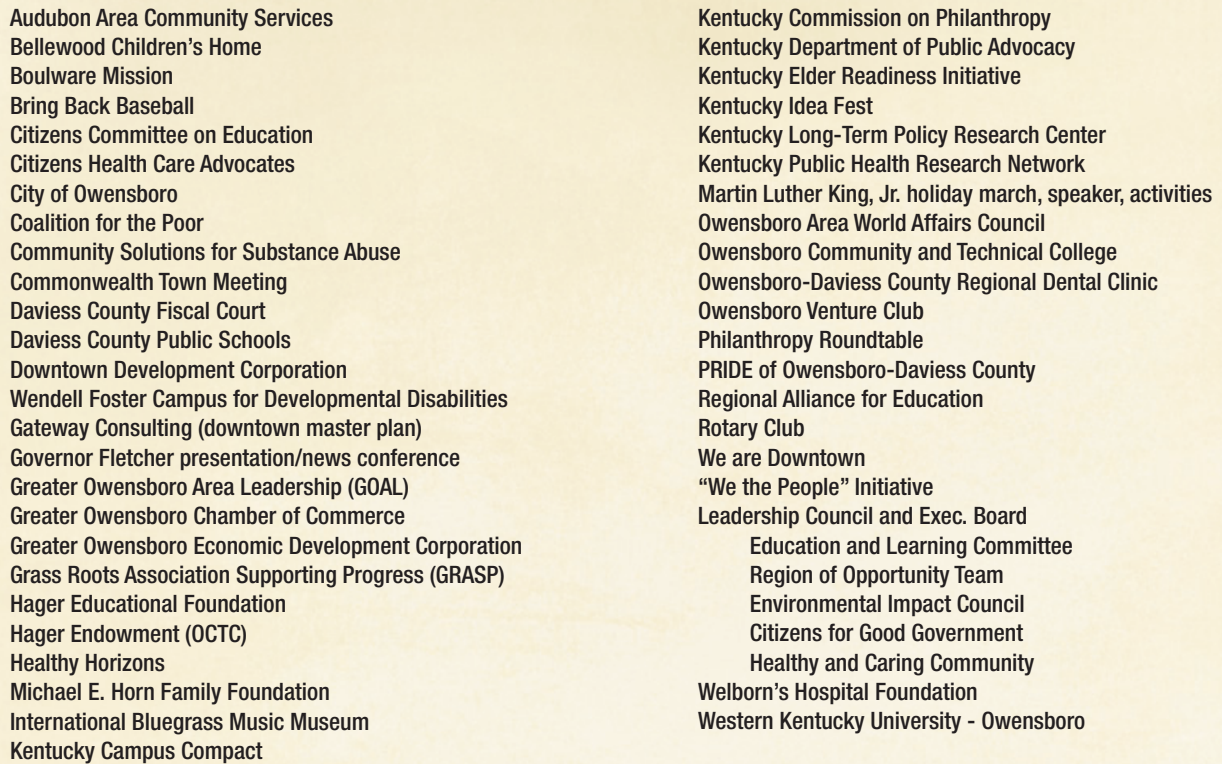
- Shoring up the arts
- Public art: an urban(e) enhancement



# Information

## Networking

To garner information and sharpen understanding of community challenges and opportunities, the foundation routinely participates in meetings, work sessions and events of governments, public agencies and community organizations. In 2008, this networking included groups and activities such as:



Audubon Area Community Services	Kentucky Commission on Philanthropy
Bellewood Children's Home	Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy
Boulware Mission	Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative
Bring Back Baseball	Kentucky Idea Fest
Citizens Committee on Education	Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center
Citizens Health Care Advocates	Kentucky Public Health Research Network
City of Owensboro	Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday march, speaker, activities
Coalition for the Poor	Owensboro Area World Affairs Council
Community Solutions for Substance Abuse	Owensboro Community and Technical College
Commonwealth Town Meeting	Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Dental Clinic
Daviess County Fiscal Court	Owensboro Venture Club
Daviess County Public Schools	Philanthropy Roundtable
Downtown Development Corporation	PRIDE of Owensboro-Daviess County
Wendell Foster Campus for Developmental Disabilities	Regional Alliance for Education
Gateway Consulting (downtown master plan)	Rotary Club
Governor Fletcher presentation/news conference	We are Downtown
Greater Owensboro Area Leadership (GOAL)	"We the People" Initiative
Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce	Leadership Council and Exec. Board
Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation	Education and Learning Committee
Grass Roots Association Supporting Progress (GRASP)	Region of Opportunity Team
Hager Educational Foundation	Environmental Impact Council
Hager Endowment (OCTC)	Citizens for Good Government
Healthy Horizons	Healthy and Caring Community
Michael E. Horn Family Foundation	Welborn's Hospital Foundation
International Bluegrass Music Museum	Western Kentucky University - Owensboro
Kentucky Campus Compact	

## Communications: e-publication, website, public access broadcasting

The *Public Life Advocate* reaches more than 1,300 subscribers. This includes most of those involved in the mainstream of community affairs and does not include those who are forwarded the publication by others: co-workers, family, friends, etc.

In 2008, our foundation website received:

15,233 unique visitors

22,261 number of visits

288,673 hits

58,463 page views

Our home page is the top visited page, followed closely by the latest edition of the *Public Life Advocate*.

Public access television channel OCTV broadcast six programs in 2008 profiling the activities of the "We the People" groups. OCTV also continues to cover meetings of Citizens Health Care Advocates and other meetings and events upon request.

## Outreach and collaboration

Citizen groups supported by the foundation also maintain websites, publish newsletters, make presentations to civic and service clubs, and appear on radio and television talk shows. The foundation fosters collaboration between community groups and citizens with complementary civic interests.

# Dialogue & Deliberation

## Citizens help shape a vision for downtown

The foundation and the “We the People” Initiative played an important role in facilitating public participation in the downtown master planning process. Dozens of meetings with stakeholder groups, community leaders and the public at-large were convened and promoted over several months. More than 500 citizens had a meaningful role in crafting a master plan and implementation strategy for our downtown.

## Technology enhances citizen engagement

The foundation acquired the technology used during the “We the People” Town Meeting that enables forum participants to be polled with individual keypads, producing instant results with demographic analysis.

This technology was used during a downtown master planning public meeting hosted by the “We the People” Initiative. Participants ranked qualities, features and design preferences they envision for Owensboro’s downtown.

## Forum on tax inequities

The foundation partnered with Citizens for Good Government in hosting a public forum on disparities in local taxation. A summary of tax inequities in city, county and school districts was presented – including long-term financial comparisons of taxation depending on where one owns property or works.

## Examining the exploding prison population problem



The foundation met with public defenders, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, jailer and social workers to examine the exploding prison population problem. The foundation published an issue brief on the topic as various state governmental officials and committees take steps to address the issue.

The foundation will monitor these developments and promote continued public dialogue on this issue as is warranted.

## Presentations and deliberative dialogue with students

The foundation continued the practice of engaging students in deliberative dialogue, whereby issues are presented objectively and options are examined in an effort to establish common ground

for action. In 2008, sessions were conducted at Owensboro Community and Technical College and Brescia University, introducing students to many of the issues and strategic options that were examined in the “We the People” Town Meeting.

## Bellewood Children’s Services

At the suggestion of Susie Alford, the foundation hosted two meetings to facilitate communication and collaboration between local youth service providers and Bellewood Children’s Services of Louisville, a Presbyterian outreach program that recently expanded to Owensboro. Bellewood operates children’s homes in several cities, but will primarily recruit and train foster parents in our community.

## Commonwealth Town Meeting



In 2008, the foundation assumed a leadership role in exploring the interest in a statewide application of deliberative dialogue. We convened an impressive array of policy analysts, philanthropists, those with experience in public deliberation, state networks, public television, academics, business leaders and more. We shared our experience with

the *AmericaSpeaks* methodology and discussed issues, techniques, timing and keys to impact.

Several follow-up meetings and conference calls have been held. If funding can be secured, it is our hope that one or more pressing state issues will be examined in a Commonwealth Town Meeting, perhaps in multiple locations across Kentucky, prior to the 2010 session of the state legislature.

## Dialogue and collaboration in the philanthropic community

Foundation president Rodney Berry was named to the Kentucky Commission on Philanthropy, a new mechanism to foster communication and collaboration among Kentucky foundations and grant making entities.

A statewide conference is planned for the fall of 2009. The conference will focus on children’s health and early childhood development.

# Action

## **“We the People” initiatives**

Given that the November 2007 “We the People” Town Meeting was characterized by:

- an unprecedented gathering of citizens from all walks of life and all areas of Owensboro-Daviess County (that, in fact, reflected the demographic profile of our community)
- the presentation of clear and balanced information on five key community challenges: education, community/economic development, environment, health and social needs, and government
- structured deliberation on strategic options moderated by trained facilitators

...then it was appropriate for the foundation to stress 2008 as a year of “action” – that is, the implementation of recommendations that came forth from the town meeting.

The “We the People” Initiative can point to progress in all five areas:

### **Education and Learning Committee**

- preparing a Citizen’s Guide for getting involved in education
- supporting “Generations United” to facilitate the involvement of seniors in our schools
- partnering with Junior Achievement on a mentoring program

### **The Region of Opportunity Team**

- hosted several meetings in connection with the downtown master plan
- researched the downtown marketplace concept that was integrated into the plan
- promoting expanded bike paths and linkages to the Greenbelt
- encouraged the city and county to purchase the Executive Inn property
- researched the downtown truck traffic problem

### **The Environmental Impact Council**

- researched curbside recycling programs, made site visits to other communities that offer curbside recycling, presented speakers from private firms that provide curbside recycling services in other locations
- presented a recommendation to county government
- planning a community education campaign

### **Citizens for Good Government**

- developed an Openness and Transparency Pledge for local elected and appointed officials
- hosting a dinner for officials featuring speakers on openness and transparency
- hosted a Local Government 101 public forum



- hosted a public forum on the structure and disparities in local taxation
- developing a youth citizenship program with the Wendell Ford Government Education Center at the Owensboro Museum of Science and History



### **Healthy and Caring Community Group**

- supporting programs of the Asset Building Coalition to help low-income individuals and families
- participating in an effort to register eligible youth in Kentucky Children’s Health Insurance Program (K-CHIP)
- collaborating with Community Solutions for Substance Abuse to expand awareness and expand local resources
- co-hosting an event to introduce representatives of local church congregations to health issues
- developed a blog called “We Care Owensboro” to help get the word out about community resources

### **Staffing and supporting the initiative**

Through a special grant from founder John Hager, the foundation was able to absorb the cost of an executive director for the “We the People” Initiative and also provide in-kind support of an office and operating support.

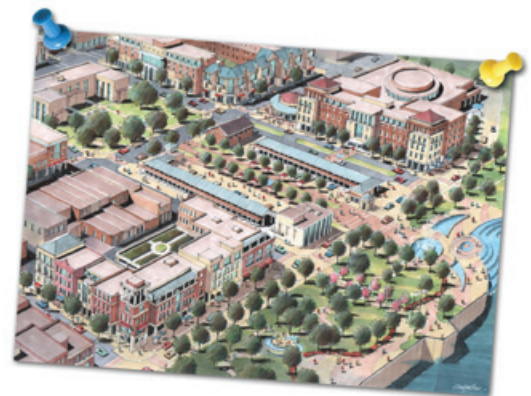
Shelly Nichols, the “We the People” executive director, monitors group activities, consults with the Leadership Council and Executive Board, provides administrative assistance, publishes a newsletter, maintains a website, and recently launched a blog.

“We the People” recently sponsored a professional development session for group leaders. The session was led by management consultant Libby Alexander, former Owensboro United Way executive and “We the People” Theme Team member. Every group was represented.

### **Leadership support of downtown master plan**

Founder John Hager also awarded a leadership grant in support of the downtown master plan. This attracted other donors and gave valuable momentum to that important effort.

President Rodney Berry serves on the Downtown Master Plan Advisory Committee and the Downtown Development Corporation.



# Action

## Center for Civic Initiatives and Nonprofit Development

Several years ago, the foundation conceived and promoted the concept of a facility and service center for civic action: ad hoc civic initiatives, fledgling nonprofit organizations or those with little or no staff or administrative capacity. Such a center would facilitate efficiency and collaboration by clustering nonprofits in a central setting.

Tentative plans call for work spaces and computers for qualifying groups, space for files, meeting rooms, resource and training center, kitchenette and more. A shared receptionist will be able to take messages, schedule the rooms, and more. Rental rates, fees and policies have not yet been established.

The original concept of working through Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC) and funding through the Hager Endowment at OCTC was abandoned. However, Audubon Area Community Services seized the opportunity and is incorporating such a center in its new housing facility behind The Springs Medical Center.

The foundation looks forward to working closely with AACCS as the facility is developed.

## Progress on dental clinic

Since examined as a community challenge in a *Public Life Advocate* article in January 2006 (followed by an issue brief published in May 2006), the foundation has been closely involved with efforts to establish a community dental clinic for low-income youth and adults. Models from other cities have been examined. The district health department researched the issue and took a leadership role. Local dentists, school nurses and social workers, county government, the Goodfellows Club, Progeny Fund, Hager Foundation and others have been involved. A nonprofit corporation was established, a plan has been developed, clinic space has been leased, improvements are being made, equipment has been ordered, and a fundraising effort has secured more than \$200,000 in gifts and pledges toward a \$300,000 goal.



## Progeny Fund grants making a difference

Progeny Fund advisors (Sally Wood, Susie Alford, Bruce Hager and Stewart Hager) refocused the fund's mission and established a strategic grantmaking process for the distribution of \$200,000 in grants annually. In 2008, the following grants were awarded:

Boulware Mission  
Brighton Center (Newport, KY)  
Citizens Health Care Advocates  
CASA of Owensboro-Daviess County  
Catholic Charities of East Tennessee fbo Columbus House Children's  
Emergency Shelter  
Owensboro Citizens Committee on Education  
Mount St. Joseph Conference & Retreat Center  
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council  
Owensboro Daviess County Regional Dental Clinic, Inc.  
PRIDE of Owensboro-Daviess County  
Promises from the Heart (Knoxville, TN)

## Previous citizen initiatives

The foundation continues to track and assist (in a limited manner) the efforts of citizen groups that the foundation helped to establish, strengthen and support:

Citizens Committee on Education  
Citizens Health Care Advocates  
Coalition for the Poor  
Goodfellows Club  
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council  
PRIDE  
Unity Coalition

## Kentucky Campus Compact Voter Initiative

The foundation awarded a grant supporting a voter registration and volunteer initiative on Kentucky college campuses. A portion of the grant was earmarked for programs at our four local colleges. The statewide program is managed at Northern Kentucky University. Susie Alford coordinated the local efforts.



## 2009: Tracking 10 Key Challenges & Opportunities

### 1. Hospital proposal

- implications on rates and fees
- site issues (flood plain, nearby industrial uses, etc.)
- public infrastructure costs
- use of the abandoned campus and more

### 2. Downtown progress

- city-county financing plan
- staffing
- Executive Inn property
- attracting private investment
- design standards

### 3. Economic opportunities

- biotechnology niche
- transportation hub (air, rail, barge, highway)
- new incentive policy
- business accelerator

### 4. Openness and transparency

- local officials pledge
- a higher cultural standard
- applications to governments, public agencies, commissions, leading private nonprofit organizations

### 5. Nonprofit resource center

- integration into AACCS's President's Place
- services, eligibility and policies
- staffing
- collaboration with Hager Endowment and colleges

### 6. A green community

- expanded recycling
- mercury emissions
- technology at proposed power plants
- green, attractive entryways and boulevards
- renewable energy models

### 7. Shoring up the arts

- debt retirement
- endowments
- sustainable operations
- Fund for the Arts
- Arts Academy

### 8. Jail challenges

- exploding population
- overcrowding
- substance abuse programs
- budget issues: state reimbursements, youth

### 9. A healthy and caring community

- early childhood education
- mentoring and adopt-a-school programs
- childhood obesity programs
- smoking cessation (particularly targeting pregnant women)
- medical and dental clinics/prenatal care
- earned income tax credit
- financial literacy, banking
- micro loans
- workforce training

### 10. Citizenship & leadership training

- issue education
- importance of openness and transparency
- timely public engagement
- restoring trust
- restructured Leadership Owensboro
- collaboration among philanthropists



# About the Foundation

**Founders:** John and Marjorie Hager (1996)

**Mission:** The Public Life Foundation facilitates broad and meaningful citizen participation in community decisions and public policy.

**Values:** We value the voice and concerns of all, particularly those who are poor and marginalized. We attempt to empower citizens from all walks of life through an open, just and democratic process. We promote stewardship, volunteerism and a community that solves problems by overcoming divisions between rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural, liberal and conservative.

**Foundation Endowment:** \$ 6.2 million (December, 2008)

**Legal Status:** Private, nonprofit 501(c)3 operating foundation

## Board of Directors

Denny Alford\*

Susie Alford, Co-chair

Rodney Berry, President/Editor, *Public Life Advocate*

Dave Boeyink, Ph.D.

Bruce Hager

Lia Hager\*

\*ex-officio

Marjorie Hager

Stewart Hager

Yolla Hager\*

Bill Speciale

Sally Wood, Co-chair/Treasurer

## Staff

Rodney Berry, President

Kathy Strobel, Office Manager/Board Secretary

## Office Space/In-Kind Support For:

Shelly Nichols, Executive Director,  
"We the People" Initiative

Sue Trautwein  
Assistant to Mr. Hager

Jean Davis O'Neal  
Goodfellows Club Annual "Roll Call" Campaign

Sally Wood  
Progeny Fund Grants Administration

## Professional Advisors

*Public Life Advocate* Editorial Board

Dave Boeyink

Fran Ellers

John Hager

Ed Staats

The Moran Financial Group

Thomas Moran, Endowment Management  
Naples, Florida

William Speciale, Financial Consultant  
Waltham, Massachusetts

Alexander and Company  
Jerry Keller, Certified Public Accountant  
Accounting and Payroll Administration  
Owensboro, Kentucky

Sullivan, Mountjoy, Stainback and Miller  
Michael Fiorella, Counsel  
Owensboro, Kentucky

