

**Public Life Foundation of Owensboro
Second Quarter 2008
Report to the Board of Directors**

**Rodney Berry, President
July 9, 2008**

Citizen momentum

Our second quarter activities underscored the value we place on implementing the priorities from the “We the People” 21st Century Town Meeting. John’s continuing generosity enables us to manage the action phase: we hired and are coaching executive director Shelly Nichols; we developed a “We the People” Initiative executive committee and leadership council; we developed organizational documents and statement of principles; we established and supported five new citizen groups

- Education and Learning Committee
- Region of Opportunity Team (ROOT)
- Environmental Impact Council (EIC)
- Healthy and Caring Community
- Citizens for Good Government (CGG)

The downtown master plan – also supported generously by John – is one of our community’s most ambitious undertakings and a top priority of town meeting participants. The initiative gained visibility and momentum this quarter when a consulting team commenced its efforts. The consultants are mindful of the importance this community places on public participation in the plan.

“We the People” Initiative group leaders have been challenged to define principles and practices that transcend open meetings-open records laws and reflect an open and transparent way of doing things. Citizens for Good Government plan to propose that local elected and appointed officials adopt such principles – surely a first anywhere in Kentucky, perhaps anywhere in the nation.

The EIC has charged ahead with a goal of convincing local officials to establish a curbside recycling service – the top priority of the town meeting.

Some groups are not as active or have more challenging, complex objectives. All are held together by determined leaders. Full group quarterly meetings are well-attended, and the town meeting database has grown to more than a thousand people.

If we can sustain the momentum, energy and participation, if groups continue to attract solid citizens and base their proposals on well-researched rationale, the “We the People” Initiative can and will grow in stature and be a stronger force to be reckoned with and lift citizen participation to an expected place in all important community decisions.

Information → Deliberation → Action

Information

Public Life Advocate

In the second quarter, we published

- ...an issue brief on the exploding prison population issue. The brief will be used as the discussion guide in an upcoming forum.
- ...articles on:
 - Community for the 21st century
 - A Main Street for People (on the Second Street truck traffic problem)
 - Why the TIF failed
 - International Center
 - Updates on “We the People” groups
 - Expanding “We the People” state-wide
 - Citizen task force spearheads dental clinic
 - Kentucky health issues poll
 - Local government and land acquisition
 - 1990 merger debate: what was voted down
 - Shoring up the arts
 - Public voice in public design
 - Wright named *AmericaSpeaks* associate

We now have 1,308 subscribers to the *Public Life Advocate*. This includes most of those involved in the mainstream of community affairs. This number does not include those who are forwarded the publication by others. In the four years since we launched the publication, 47 people have dropped their subscription. (Some relocated to other communities or changed their email address and re-subscribed).

We plan to analyze our subscriber list and develop a plan to target marketing efforts to those who do not subscribe.

Website

During the first six months of this year, our website received:

- 1,286 to 1,612 unique visitors
- 1,909 to 2,145 number of visits
- 26,381 to 30,108 hits

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

Freelance writers

We plan to establish (and re-establish) relationships with freelance journalists for special assignments that may require extensive research.

Public access television

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

Outreach

Shelly Nichols, executive director of the “We the People” Initiative, plans to routinely make presentations to civic clubs, appear on talk shows and collaborate with other organizations, such as the Wendell Ford Government Education Center at the Owensboro Museum of Science and History. “We the People” Initiative publishes a newsletter every other month and maintains the website established prior to the town meeting: www.wethepeopletownmeeting.org.

Networking

To sharpen our understanding of community issues, we participate in meetings and functions of governments, public agencies and private nonprofit organizations. During the second quarter, this included networking with:

Bellewood Children’s Home/Youth Services agencies
Boulware Mission
Citizens Committee on Education
Citizens Health Care Advocates
City of Owensboro (strategic planning, hearings)
Coalition for the Poor
Community Solutions for Substance Abuse
Daviess County Fiscal Court/staff
Daviess County Public Schools (banquet)
Downtown Development Corporation
Downtown Master Plan Advisory Committee
Education Alliance
Gateway Consulting (Ft. Worth) – downtown master planners
Greater Owensboro Area Leadership (GOAL)
Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce
Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation
Greenville, South Carolina downtown tour, meeting
Hager Educational Foundation
Healthy Horizons
Horn Foundation
International Bluegrass Music Museum

Owensboro Area World Affairs Council
Owensboro Community and Technical College (officials)
Owensboro-Daviess Regional Dental Clinic
Greater Owensboro Venture Club
Ron Payne, candidate for mayor
Philanthropy Roundtable
PRIDE
Rotary Club
We are Downtown
“We the People” Work Groups:
 Education and Learning Committee
 Region of Opportunity Team
 Environmental Impact Council
 Citizens for Good Government
 Healthy and Caring Community
 Executive Committee
 Leadership Council
 Quarterly meeting
Western Kentucky University – Owensboro Advisory Committee
 – Luncheon with president, officials

Deliberation

The exploding prison population

We invited public defenders, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, jailer and social workers to assist in planning a public forum on the exploding prison population issue. A planning meeting was held on July 8.

Turning Point technology

The prison population forum will be our first opportunity to use the Turning Point technology and keypads we recently purchased. This is the same technology used during the “We the People” Town Meeting. It will enable us to have instant feedback and demographic comparisons of polling conducted during the forum.

Ongoing community dialogue

Despite our priority on implementation of the priorities from the “We the People” Town Meeting, there is and will be a need for public deliberation on issues that arise from time to time. The “Conversation Café” methodology is one form of community dialogue that may serve a purpose for the time being.

We recently took steps to revitalize the program. Chad Gesser (sociology instructor at Owensboro Community & Technical College) is interested in a leadership role. We are

considering several program modifications or enhancements: more promotion through a board or steering committee, a focus group approach by invitation only, or multiple locations with compensated facilitators at each site.

We are considering other methodologies as well: Public Conversation Project and Study Circles, for example.

Public participation in downtown plan

Community and downtown development leaders invited me to serve on the downtown master planning and “placemaking” initiative steering committee. This includes a role in monitoring public participation in bringing about the people’s vision for downtown and the riverfront. Jennifer Wright designed the process and has been retained by the consultants to coordinate the public participation dimension of the planning process.

Public deliberation and state policy

During the second quarter, we took a major step in moving forward a statewide application of deliberative dialogue. On May 12, 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.

A follow-up meeting with a smaller task force will occur on July 16. It is our hope that one or more pressing state issues can be examined through a credible form of public deliberation, perhaps in multiple locations across Kentucky prior to the next session of the state legislature.

Action

“We the People” Initiative

Action groups that formed following the town meeting are working on the following priorities:

- The Education and Learning Committee plans a “citizens’ guide” for getting involved in education and are exploring how the “Generations United” program can benefit our schools.
- ROOT has a seat at the table as the downtown master planning process begins. They are following the implications of the Executive Inn closing and ROOT leaders have encouraged the city and county to acquire the property. They are also interested in improving the truck traffic problem on Second Street.
- EIC plans a community education campaign on the benefits of curbside recycling following field trips to facilities in other communities and presentations by firms that

provide such services for nearby communities. They plan to make a formal proposal to the city and county in September.

- The Healthy and Caring Community group encouraged state legislators to get behind proposals to help low-income families get on their feet. The group is also collaborating with Community Solutions for Substance Abuse to expand awareness and expand local resources for treatment. They are also planning a volunteer jobs fair.
- CGG is developing a set of principles regarding openness and transparency that can set a new standard for local governments, tax districts, public agencies, and major private nonprofit community organizations. On July 8, they held the first in a series of public forums: Local Government 101. The next forum will cover taxation issues.

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), we have been closely involved with efforts to establish a community dental clinic. Through the leadership of several local dentists, social workers, educators, the Hager Educational Foundation, and JAT Mountjoy of the Green River District Health Department, a plan has been developed, a facility identified, a new nonprofit corporation established, and grant proposals have been submitted to acquire and equip a clinic.

The clinic will likely serve adults as well as youth who are uninsured or covered through Medicaid. The clinic will require an operating subsidy initially. The Progeny Fund and the Goodfellows Club are among the strongest supporters. Responses are expected on most of the grant applications within the next few months.

Bellewood Children's Services

At the suggestion of Susie Alford, we 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.

Citizen group resource center

We recently introduced to the Philanthropic Roundtable the concept of a Center for Citizen Action – facilities and services that would enable nonprofit organizations (established, emerging and ad hoc groups) to benefit from efficiencies and collaboration by clustering citizen groups in a central setting.

Initially we were interested in the concept to help sustain the organizations the foundation supported in recent years: Citizens Health Care Advocates, PRIDE, Citizens Committee on Education, Owensboro Area World Affairs Council and others.

We had been developing a plan with Jackie Addington at Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC), supported through a \$500,000 endowment by John and Marjorie Hager. At one point, we were hopeful that OCTC would provide space for such a center. Unfortunately, OCTC is unable to provide space for this purpose. The Center, as envisioned by the new OCTC president, will feature a web site with links to civic engagement resources, professional development for local nonprofits, service learning projects (e.g., internships) for students, faculty projects and more.

We are continuing to work on a plan that OCTC officials will support. And recently Audubon Area Community Services has expressed interest in partnering with us to provide space and services.

State steering committee

The Director of the University of Kentucky's Center for Health Management and Research, Doug Scutchfield, MD invited me to serve on the Kentucky Public Health Research Network Steering Committee – an apparent requisite for a grant proposal to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Scutch assures me that this duty will involve no more than two meetings per year, so I will probably agree to serve.

Progeny Fund

Grants Administrator Sally Wood has been reviewing applications that were submitted in response to a Request for Proposal process adopted by the fund advisors for the first time this year. The family plans to award approximately \$200,000 in grants in 2008.

In May, a Public Life Foundation/Progeny Fund delegation (Susie Alford, Rodney Berry, Bruce Hager and Josh Neihaus) attended a Wachovia conference on family philanthropy in New Orleans.

Administration

Summer intern

Sarah Wood has been working in the office as a part-time summer intern. She has researched dental clinics, assisted with office administration, and will be helping us analyze the *Public Life Advocate* subscription list.

Personnel policies

We recently rediscovered our unfinished and pending personnel policies. Although Kathy and I are the only foundation employees (Sally and Shelly are independent contractors), we need to adopt some policies. The Personnel Committee will review and report to the full board.

Board meeting

We have not heard from everyone, but it appears that a November meeting is the preferred target for our next board of directors meeting.

Endowment

Our portfolio has been on a bumpy ride of late. Our seven account total dropped \$498,052 in June after increasing in value since April. Our portfolio value is down \$578,264 since the beginning of the year and, as of June 30, stands at \$8,359,353.

Operating expenses

Through six months, operating expenses are running about \$20,000 higher than budget projections. However, these expenses are offset by John's \$20,000 contribution (first of four installments) toward "We the People" Initiative activities, which includes the (unbudgeted) salary of Shelly Nichols and more than \$9,000 in town meeting sponsorships that came in after the first of the year. John also reimbursed the foundation for expenses that enabled a delegation from the foundation to attend the Wachovia conference on family philanthropy