

# Community Focus

## A Report for Springfield and Greene County

# 2004

*Community Focus: A Report for Springfield and Greene County* identifies several community conditions or trends that deserve recognition or immediate action. The Blue Ribbons indicate outstanding community successes or attributes; the Red Flags signal community problems that demand our attention. Viewed together, the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags reveal some striking community paradoxes. For example, although Springfield is a community energized by a robust economy and a dynamic small business environment, it faces an array of serious problems stemming from an increasing number of children living in poverty. Consider that our community has nationally recognized health facilities, programs and services, yet many children lack access to basic medical and dental care. Finally, as our city and county develop and implement commendable participatory visioning and planning models, our public schools struggle to develop strategies that will ensure adequate funding.

Certainly, these contradictions are not unique to Springfield, yet our success in nurturing community strengths while overcoming pressing challenges will ultimately shape the future of Springfield and Greene County.



Springfield City Hall

## Blue Ribbons

The Community Focus highlights leading indicators in a wide range of areas. Taken together, they portray a community bolstered by an excellent economic climate that features a dynamic small business environment, a vast array of health and wellness resources, and a strong commitment to civic engagement and collaboration.

*The overall economy of Springfield and Greene County is outstanding.* Fueled by a nationally recognized small-business climate, our economy is a major part of a regional boom that is an economic growth engine for the state. New and diverse job markets, vigorous higher education and health sectors, and a reasonable cost of living all contribute to our region's continued economic vitality. Springfield's exciting Center City redevelopment is a reflection of this strength.



CoxHealth Medical Center South

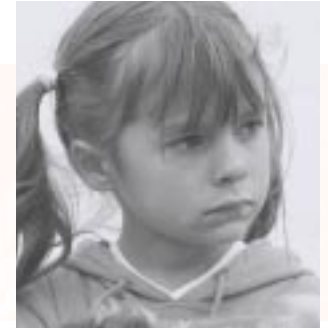
*Springfield and Greene County are rich in medical and public health programs.* Anchored by CoxHealth and St. John's Health System, two lauded health institutions, Springfield is a regional hub for health and medical services. These assets are augmented by a progressive and innovative public health department and strengthened further by Drury University's outstanding reputation in pre-medical studies and Southwest Missouri State University's Ozarks Public Health Institute.

*Vision 20/20, an exemplary community-based planning process, headlines a variety of collaborative efforts that have moved our community forward.* Whether it is the Urban Districts Alliance working with the Springfield Finance and Development Corporation to assist Center City redevelopment or The Good Community educating city leaders on key issues, most of our meaningful community accomplishments are achieved through collaboration and coalition building.

## Red Flags

Growth poses challenges. Springfield's increased urbanization and the national trend toward economic polarization have resulted in greater numbers of our children living in poverty. Reducing the impact of increasing domestic instability, ensuring that all children receive adequate medical and dental services, and adequately funding public education so that all children can succeed will require a thoughtful and systemic effort.

*Too many children in our community suffer from the lingering effects of poverty.* Domestic instability is a well-documented outcome of poverty. Domestic violence, child abuse, neglect rates that are higher than the state averages, and greater incidences in youth drug-related crimes all warrant the immediate attention of our community. The presence of high methamphetamine traffic in Springfield and Greene County is believed to be a major contributing factor to some if not all of these problems.



*The needs of many at-risk children in Springfield are not being met.* Our community must be willing to address the issue of inadequate social and health-related services. Many children in Springfield and Greene County lack access to adequate dental and health care.

*Public schools in Springfield and Greene County lag far behind the state average in per pupil expenditures.* Although college-bound students generally do well, current dropout rates are not acceptable to our community. Throwing money at educational problems usually solves little, but area schools will find it increasingly difficult to serve the growing numbers of at-risk students without adequate resources. The recent support (June 2004) of a tax-levy increase for Springfield Public Schools was a step in the right direction, but school leadership, the school board and advocacy groups must continue to work together to make the case for stronger support of public education.

*Note: Throughout the Community Focus: A Report for Springfield and Greene County, Blue Ribbon and Red Flag indicators have been used to identify information related to these findings.*