We are a community that takes the notion of public order and safety seriously. Passage of the 9-1-1 sales tax, a new Crime Lab, community mobilization to reduce gang activity, positive results on the annual Springfield Police Citizen Survey, an excellent Insurance Services Organization (ISO) Rating, and emergency responses to a major ice storm were all identified as blue ribbons in previous Community Focus reports. And, through the combined efforts of many and the leadership of the Safety Council of the Ozarks, we remain a Safe Community as designated by the World Health Organization - only the third in the United States to receive such an award. This designation is awarded to communities that have demonstrated leadership in promoting safety, reducing injuries, and preparing their citizens for natural and man-made disasters.

However, as reported in the 2007 and 2009 Community Focus reports, public safety agencies in Greene County have endured serious budget reductions resulting in significant staff shortages affecting law enforcement. The strong foundation that had been built over the years to ensure a safe community in Springfield was in jeopardy. Fortunately, all involved in the arena of public safety came together to collaborate, innovate, and create positive change to help address problems from the use of volunteer staffing in some agencies to finding grants to offset some of the local funding streams that were reduced. City leaders worked to address the police and fire pension issue, funding was identified for additional police personnel, and fire stations went off rotational closure. A significant shortage remains in Judicial, Prosecution and Public Defender personnel that constrains advances in public safety and will be exacerbated by increases in law enforcement personnel without proportional increases in these parts of the criminal justice system.

**BLUE RIBBONS**

**Addressing the Police/Fire Pension Plan**

City and community leaders worked diligently to address the underfunded Police and Fire Pension Fund and a sales tax was passed to generate revenue dedicated to adding monies to this fund. This was critical for two reasons: police and fire personnel were leaving the departments due to uncertainty surrounding the underfunding that exacerbated the existing staff shortages, and the shortage had a potential negative impact on the entire City budget.

**Collaborative Efforts to Address Public Safety**

The City of Springfield initiated a collaborative, multi-sector Strategic Planning Process that included a Public Safety section to chart a positive path for the future. During this process, many innovative ideas came forth that allowed community leaders to look at public safety in an expanded light, including the role technology plays in public order and safety.

In an effort to increase collaboration and stretch resources, the Greene County Sheriff’s Office (GCSO) and the Springfield Police Department (SPD) are working together in many areas, including training, investigative task forces, and records management sharing. A Police-Fire Regional Training Center also is being built. Additionally, community agencies and private citizens have stepped up to enhance public safety efforts, such as Kurt Lawson’s Safe and Sober Prom Initiative, Southeast Rotary’s Don’t Meth With Us presentations for 5th graders, and the Gang Task Force’s Graffiti Reporting program, a youth-driven initiative.

**Development of Emergency Resources**

The Springfield-Greene County Office of Emergency Management has enhanced The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training for citizens and local agencies. CERT trains volunteers to assist in the event of a disaster and to date 72 of the 584 people trained are registered CERT volunteers available should a major disaster occur. Demand for this 30-plus hour training is high. A new Public Safety Center also is being built to house the Office of Emergency Management and the 911 Center, which will further centralize emergency services and emergency call response.

**Greene County DWI and Drug Courts**

These specialized courts have gained national recognition by the U.S. Department of Justice for their outcomes. Defendants have been assisted in obtaining services in residential or community-based treatment centers, and many have been able to seek employment. There has been a shift from punitive to restorative justice, and in many cases families have been able to remain together as defendants have been diverted from incarceration.

**Community Focus**

Public Order and Safety

“Public safety is something most of us take for granted; we only miss it when it’s gone. The new community strategic plan will, for the first time, contain a chapter devoted to public safety. Through the city’s strategic planning process, it became apparent that public safety has a strong interrelationship with most of our community’s red flag issues. Imagine trying to promote economic development and recruit employers to a city that gains a reputation as being unsafe.”

Greg Burris, City Manager, Springfield

Springfield Firefighters in Action.

Chief Paul Williams, Springfield Police Department, and Sheriff Jim Arnott, Greene County Sheriff’s Office.

SpringfieldCommunityFocus.org
We also have seen a sharp increase in the teen abuse of prescription medications as well as the emergence of use by young people of analog drugs, including bath salts, K 3, and mephedrone. At the same time, resources devoted to educating young people about the dangers of illegal drug use have declined. Springfield Public Schools had to cut its substance abuse specialists due to the ending of a federal grant. While organizations such as Community Partnership of the Ozarks have worked hard to provide substance abuse education, they, too, have been affected by staffing and budgetary constraints.

### Rising Crime Rates

Identified as a red flag in the 2007 Community Focus report, crimes against persons and property continue to increase, according to the Springfield Police Department. Crimes against persons, which include rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, rose 10.94 percent from 2009 to 2010; however crimes against property remain the highest volume crime category reported. During 2010, the number of property crimes reported to the SPD was 15,216, up from 14,012 in 2009.

Property crimes are most often associated with illicit drug activity and drug arrests for those under 18 years of age are also beginning to trend upwards after a period of decline. These crimes are a serious threat to the community and the shortage of law enforcement personnel has most certainly compounded the problem.

### Alcohol-Related Accidents

A recent red flag in several Community Focus reports, and while numbers have dropped from 352 in 2008 to 286 in 2010, they remain a serious problem in terms of loss of life, injury, and property loss. Local, county, and state law enforcement agencies continue to work together to reduce alcohol-related accidents through joint enforcement and education.

### High Rate of Domestic Violence

Greene County continues to experience one of the highest domestic violence rates in the state, which has been identified as a red flag since the 2004 Community Focus report. The number of domestic violence assaults reported by the Springfield Police Department increased from 2,318 in 2008 to 2,398 in 2010, after showing a small decline in 2009. Many factors play into this high level of domestic violence, but drug activity, including the use of methamphetamine, is one of the leading causes. Not only do the adult victims suffer from this violence, but the children involved may experience abuse, neglect, and a myriad of emotional and physical problems. Diversion programs, family violence shelters, anger-management counseling, and referrals to community support services are some of the methods being used to combat the problem. In some cases, however, arrest and incarceration are necessary.

### Inadequate Community/Individual Disaster Preparedness*

The challenge exists of preparing our community members to be able to adequately respond to and recover from local disasters. This was cited as an emerging issue in the 2009 Community Focus report and a recent community survey on the state of preparedness shows both a lack of individual preparedness, as well as a need for improvement on the part of business and the faith community in adopting preparedness principles.

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* Indicates Emerging Issue in 2009 Community Focus Report