

Leadership Visit Reveals the *"Best Kept Secrets"* of Springfield





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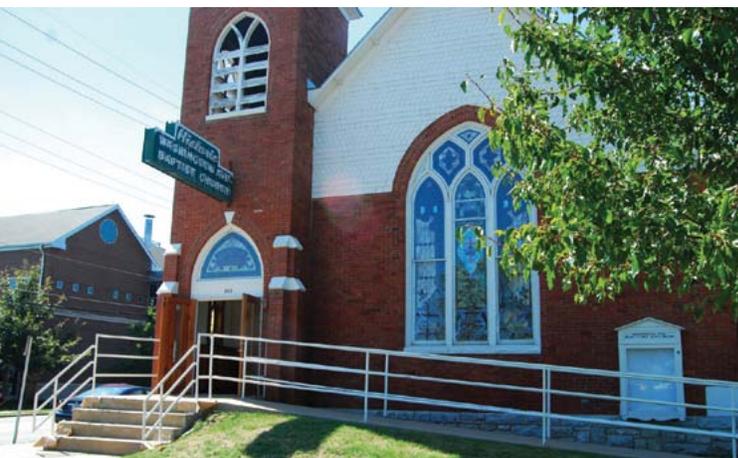
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Executive Summary

Springfield's "Best Kept" Secrets



A group of 72 Springfield area business, education and government leaders participated in the Chamber's 17th annual community leadership visit September 16-17, 2010. For the first time ever, the annual program focused on our own community during the two-day visit . . . to Springfield, Missouri.

Designed to be an intense and introspective study of Springfield, the visit gave participants a chance to learn about our community, see new things and challenge our own assumptions about this place we call "home."

The group explored business and economic development with a look back at key stages in Springfield's economic growth through the years, and a look forward with consideration of how Springfield is positioned to compete in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

Participants were amazed to learn about the research taking place at the Roy Blunt Jordan Valley Innovation Center (JVIC), especially the medical devices being developed by the St. John's Medical Research Institute.

The entrepreneurial success story of the

Taylor-Martin Group wowed the Springfield delegation as participants toured the Lofts at Inspired Commerce and learned about Bridge Blue Sourcing Partners, which supplies home furnishings for more than one-third of the nation's top 50 retailers.

A session with Springfield area business leaders Louis Griesemer (Springfield Underground), Greg Henslee (O'Reilly Auto Parts), and Jack Stack (SRC Holdings Corporation) reminded the community leadership delegation to not forget about the importance of manufacturing. The panelists also said local government must do a better job at becoming aware of the goals and strategic plans of local businesses because they help generate the public revenue that funds government activities.

Discussions of nanotechnology, innovation and entrepreneurship gave way to the pain of realizing that almost half of the students in Springfield Public Schools are eligible for the free-and-reduced price lunch program and nearly 50 percent of the homeless in our community are children.

Specifically, participants took an in-depth look at two obstacles standing in the way of Springfield's future economic success -- poverty and a lack of cultural diversity.

As the conversation veered toward solutions and remedies, however, a common theme emerged -- the strong belief that education must be our foundation.

Participants concluded the two-day visit with a renewed appreciation for the collaboration that exists in the Springfield area and a desire to better communicate community successes. This report on the 2010 Community Leadership Visit will begin the process of telling those success stories and sparking the dialogue needed to move forward on the challenging goals of reducing poverty and improving inclusion.

Did You Know?

Some Springfield Physicians are Inventors Too

One of the “faces of JVIC” is Dr. Bharat Shah of the St. John’s Medical Research Institute. Dr. Shah is a plastic surgeon who is also an inventor. In addition to his focus on patient care, he approaches his work with two thoughts in mind: 1) how can I fix things that are broken?; and 2) how can I find ways to do things better? Dr. Shah often sees things that could work better, but he doesn’t always know how to turn his ideas into finished products. That’s where the “technology accelerator” of JVIC comes in.

Operating under the banner of “Problem – Idea – Solution,” the St. John’s Medical Research Institute takes the ideas generated by Dr. Shah and other St. John’s



physicians and conducts research on how to fix the problem or improve the procedure. By having researchers and health care providers working side-by-side it is easier to determine the “real-world” application of the new products.

As these innovations progress through the full spectrum from initial idea to finished product, Inveno Health takes on the challenge of commercialization by researching intellectual property protection and designing a marketing strategy for the new product. Some products such as Hands First, an alcohol-free foam hand sanitizer, are already on the market. Others are about to reach that point.

Dr. Shah talked about two of his inventions with the community leadership visit delegation. He has invented a surgical table for cranial reconstructions of infants. The “Secure 360” table allows the surgical team to position an infant (generally three to six months of age) for surgery in about two minutes, while the current method takes 45 minutes. The new table provides for

a much safer surgery and, for an anxious parent, having their child under anesthesia for 43 fewer minutes is a significant improvement too.

Sometimes major innovations can come from asking the simple question, “why do we do it this way?” Dr. Shah asked that question about the primitive way broken jaws are treated, which has been relatively unchanged for around 2,500 years. As a result of his new thinking, St. John’s Medical Research Institute is now developing a polymer system that uses “zip-tie” attachments to replace the sharp and uncomfortable wires that have closed broken jaws since the time of Hippocrates. Aside from being better for patients, the new technology greatly reduces the risk of disease transmission for health care workers treating the injured patient.

For Springfield, the golden opportunity is to keep these innovations coming and eventually diversify our manufacturing base by producing these new products locally.

By having researchers and health care providers working side-by-side it is easier to determine the “real-world” application of the new products.

Did You Know?

Getting Beyond our Perceptions of Springfield

The overwhelming reaction to the delegation's visit to IDEA Commons was one of sheer surprise and disbelief that these things are going on in Springfield, Missouri. Envisioned by Missouri State University, IDEA Commons is a 36-acre urban research park that blends residential, office, retail, entertainment and industry in Springfield's center city.

Nothing symbolized the "I never knew this existed in Springfield" concept more than the companies of the Taylor-Martin Group. What surprised our group of presumably aware community leaders ranged from the urban living offered by the Lofts at Inspired Commerce to the \$250 ergonomically-designed dog bowls sold by Unleashed Life, which produces top-end accessories for extremely devoted pet owners. Most of all, though, the entrepreneurial success of owners Nathan Taylor and J. Kent Martin was what wowed the Springfield delegation.

"We didn't choose Springfield. Springfield chose us," said Taylor, who relocated from Dallas with his partner when Martin began a job with the local home furnishings company formerly known as Decorize. Taylor came on board at Decorize a few months later. After later separating from Decorize, Martin and Taylor didn't leave Springfield. Instead, they started a company called Bridge Blue Sourcing Partners, which now designs home furnishings for more than one-third of the top 50 retailers in the nation.

With products designed in Springfield and manufactured abroad, Bridge Blue supplies furniture for department stores such as Dillard's, Sears, JC Penney's, Neiman Marcus, Ralph Lauren and the Bombay Company. They host the department stores' buyers at Taylor-Martin's Springfield showroom for regular meetings to discuss trends for the upcoming season and make specific adjustments to proposed designs for the private label furnishings they produce for the retailers. "We thrive on the excitement of people coming in to see our space," said Taylor.

Taylor-Martin creations are being used to furnish a project outside Dubai and a new boutique hotel in London. Closer to home, area residents now have the chance to shop for Taylor-Martin products at Obelisk Home – the company's retail outlet in Springfield.

So why were we surprised that downtown Springfield can be the home of such a unique entrepreneurial success story? And why were we so surprised to feel like we'd crossed over into a big-city, cosmopolitan environment? One community leadership visit participant said it very well: "Sometimes we let our perceptions of Springfield get in the way of what is possible. If we didn't have those in-grown barriers, we could have even more success as a community."



"We didn't choose Springfield. Springfield chose us."

- Nathan Taylor
Taylor-Martin Group

Did You Know?

Making a Difference in the Lives of Children and Families



“We don’t allow
poverty to be
an excuse.”

- J. Anderson
Campbell Elementary School

Dr. J. Anderson is on the front lines of Springfield’s effort to serve and support those in poverty. He is the principal of Campbell Elementary School, where 95 percent of the students are in the free-and-reduced-price school lunch program and two-thirds of the children live in single-parent homes. Anderson believes education and support systems are the best way to address poverty.

Campbell School is making a difference in the lives of its students and their families in many ways. They offer a GED program for parents because one-third of them dropped out of high school. Campbell’s school nurse serves as a health care resource for the entire Campbell community, often giving medical advice over the phone for treatment of parents and siblings of Campbell students.

Probably most important, however, is Campbell’s focus on creating a positive climate for students by emphasizing character education and social skills. “We don’t allow poverty to be an excuse,” said Principal Anderson. “We teach them that it’s okay to work.”

An important part of shaping the right attitude among students is the way they start the week. Anderson said “positive kickoffs” on Monday mornings are significant because the weekends are so tough for these kids. On many Mondays, Anderson will arrive at his office to find a stack of police reports detailing incidents over the weekend involving the parents of Campbell students. You can imagine how difficult it could be for these students to focus on school. Anderson tries to ensure that Campbell School is a place that provides stability for them and he strives to make it a positive place to be.

Likewise, Campbell’s “Partners in Education” are important because their involvement sends the message that “there is somebody else in the community who cares about me,” said Anderson.

As if these character-building successes are not enough, Campbell School also achieves at a high-level academically – scoring well on school assessments and consistently ranking among school district leaders in student attendance.

Did You Know?

Moving from Isolation to Inclusion



John Oke-Thomas didn't have the social support he needed when he was starting his business in Springfield 26 years ago. The African-American architect studied how businesses like his had succeeded in other communities that looked like ours (i.e. not racially diverse). But it was very difficult for him in Springfield. Oke-Thomas experienced what he now calls a "welcoming deficit" as he felt ignored and questioned as to why he was in Springfield anyway. "I had to go back to Kansas City just to breathe again and decide whether I wanted to come back," he said.

Like Oke-Thomas, Francine Pratt has experienced "passive racism" during her time in Springfield. For example, there have been job leads that sounded promising over the phone but all of a sudden disappeared when she showed up for the in-person interview. Dr. Leslie Anderson, the interim chief diversity officer at Missouri State University, calls these types of incidents "micro-aggressions" and she said they happen all the time in our community.

Fortunately for Springfield, John Oke-Thomas did come back to continue his architectural practice here even though the vast majority of his clients are still

outside southwest Missouri. Fortunately for Springfield, Francine Pratt has stayed here and now she heads the local chapter of the NAACP as well as serving as executive director for a local non-profit. Both are working to make our community a more inclusive place.

Oke-Thomas helped found the Minorities in Business organization that works to help others overcome the welcoming deficit that Oke-Thomas described. He has seen incremental change but he's still frustrated with the lack of progress. "After a while you get tired of waiting for the future change that has often been promised," Oke-Thomas said. "We need action. Talk is cheap. Do we want to be part of the global community or stay as we are?"

So how do we get there? Possible solutions offered by the panelists included improved efforts by local organizations to reach out to African-Americans and other minorities. They suggested Springfield can become more inclusive by:

- Promoting internships and mentorships to help minorities identify and pursue business and professional opportunities,

- Pushing local businesses and institutions to become more aggressive in reaching out to do business with minority-owned enterprises,
- Continuing the Facing Racism program and other efforts to combat passive racism and instill an anti-racist attitude within our community,
- Improving diversity training within the education system, and
- Making the membership and governance of local organizations more representative of the diversity in our community.

"It's not rocket science. It doesn't take a whole lot of money. Just ask somebody (to be involved) and take them along," said Francine Pratt, as she emphasized how greater inclusion and engagement is a reachable goal for the community. "That's the marvel of this. It's so doable."

**"We need action.
Talk is cheap.
Do we want to
be part of the
global community
or stay as we are?"**

*- John Oke-Thomas
Oke-Thomas + Associates*



Did You Know?

Springfield's Poverty Level is Rising Rapidly

The Springfield region is growing faster than the city of Springfield, and almost twice as fast as the U.S. average. We have outpaced the state in job growth over the last several years. Yet, we also have significant challenges based on the changing demographics of our region.

According to Dr. Michael Stout, sociologist at Missouri State University, recent research shows that the region's median household income is significantly lower than the national average and that the poverty rate is growing rapidly. Today, one of every two single mothers in the region is living in poverty and nearly 50 percent of elementary children in the Springfield R-12 School District qualify for a free or reduced lunch. Homelessness exists in our community in record numbers, and many of the homeless in our community are children – some estimates show as many as 50 percent of the homeless population in Springfield.

Challenges to overcoming poverty are numerous and include a lack of adequate affordable housing, difficulty in understanding and accessing the system, a high rate of drug and alcohol abuse among the impoverished, and a perception among the public that those in poverty are “lazy” or unmotivated to find work when many simply don't have the necessary skills required for available jobs.

Yet one of the strengths of the community is the collaborative spirit with which leaders address local challenges. For example, a Homeless Task Force is working with the faith community to provide emergency homeless shelters and the higher education community to provide customized training. According to Annie Busch, co-chair of the Homeless Task Force and a self-described preventionist, “Ignoring a problem doesn't make it go away. It makes it worse. If you don't have a heart for the issue, you need to have a pocketbook for the issue.”



Likewise, organizations such as The Kitchen Clinic, Jordan Valley Community Health Center, Ozarks Community Hospital Medicaid clinics and hospital emergency rooms are working to provide a “safety net” for health care. Yet, it is not enough. Dr. Janie Vestal with The Kitchen Clinic acknowledges, “We’re an efficient operation but we can’t handle the volume.” New patients have been known to wait three days, in some cases in long lines in front of the clinic, just to see a doctor. “The determinants of health have little to do with health care. Really it’s poverty that we need to fix,” said Vestal.

So what does this trend toward increased poverty mean for Springfield? Stout’s concern is that this economic disparity has created significant social divisions (particularly between north and south Springfield) that affect involvement and engagement in government decision-making and community development efforts.

Stout notes that Springfield has “domestic in-migration” from the surrounding re-

gion, and this further complicates the poverty statistics. Individuals and families from the outlying rural areas come here to access social services and this dynamic increases poverty levels even more. At the same time, Springfield is losing its well-educated young people to larger, metropolitan communities who often can pay more for similar jobs. With the loss of these young people, Springfield also loses talent and potential for greater economic contributions.

As we work to address the tremendous societal challenges of increased poverty, Stout says community leaders need to be reminded that we live in a region where people generally don’t want the government to help them. They just want to be heard and feel like they have some sense of control over their lives. This will make gaining public trust a difficult yet important aspect to finding solutions, but those solutions should include a commitment towards a “deliberative democracy” where an inclusive approach leads to more citizen involvement in the process.

“If you don’t have a heart for the issue, you need to have a pocketbook for the issue.”

- Annie Busch
Homeless Task Force





Did You Know?

Success begins with an Investment in Early Childhood Education

One area that community leaders seem to agree on is the vital importance of education in addressing everything from poverty, to workforce readiness, to economic development. The message regarding education is clear: a comprehensive approach to education at all levels is critical to ensure individual potential is realized – and that begins, both literally and figuratively, with early childhood.

Early childhood education is critical because 80 percent of human brain development happens before the age of five. Studies have repeatedly shown the significant return on investment a community sees with investment in early education programs. Having quality Pre-K programs affects children in their most impressionable years and helps to ensure their educational success, leading to higher graduation rates, greater economic contributions, and reduced crime and poverty levels.

Missy Riley understands firsthand the value provided by Pre-K education. As director of early childhood for Springfield Public Schools, Missy and her staff work with hundreds of students and their families in the Wonder Years program, a district-wide, free academic preschool program that prepares at-risk children for kindergarten. The program focuses on students' language development, literacy, math skills, and social interaction – the basics.

Because of the Wonder Years Program, at-risk kids are given the chance to work on some of these educational foundations that they might not have the chance to develop at home. They are then prepared to show up on their first day of kindergarten equipped to learn at levels comparable to their classmates. Kindergarten screening results provide undeniable proof that the Wonder Years program and others like it work. "We're changing lives, we really believe that," says Riley. However, the success is limited to a pre-defined number of students due to funding limitations. Unfortunately, the waiting list is long for families who want to give their children that opportunity.

Investment in early childhood will help provide the foundation for students who seek to achieve at all levels of education. Although the specifics may change from one's earliest years to their college years, and homework assignments may shift from counting to ten to statistical analysis, the message regarding education remains the same – investment in education translates to an investment in economic success. Dr. Mike Nietzel, advisor to Governor Jay Nixon on Higher Education/Workforce Development, believes that access to higher education will be increasingly important to raise the earning potential of workers. As jobs slowly return from the severe economic recession experienced over the last few years, it is apparent that

a college degree will be required more than ever before. According to Nietzel, projections show that 59 percent of all new jobs in Missouri will require a post-secondary education by the year 2018. This is in sharp contrast to 1970, when fewer than 30 percent of jobs required any education beyond high school.

For those that might not seek a traditional four-year degree, job training and technical education are a vital educational element to bring the unemployed or underemployed into a more productive role in the local workforce. As any advanced education opportunity can do, short-term training programs can provide an effective pathway out of poverty. Additionally, technical education is critical to support our traditional base of business and industry by providing a skilled and trained workforce.

So what's the challenge? Higher education plays a significant role in our local economy and the presence of numerous higher education institutions provides great options for post-secondary education. However, locally our state-funded higher education institutions face significant budget cuts based on the state's revenue decline. Ozarks Technical Community College, in particular, is worth noting. Although they have the third highest enrollment of all community colleges statewide, they rank last in state funding. Consequently, the tuition cost to students is higher than any other community college in Missouri. With the Springfield campus and surrounding campuses at full capacity, access is limited and students often can't enroll in the classes they need presenting a missed opportunity for the student.

This funding dilemma goes beyond dollars and cents and has an undeniable impact on individuals. Consider a single mother working full time to provide support for her family. She has a strong work ethic, but because of a lack of education and training she is not qualified for many of the careers she would like to pursue. In order to make ends meet, she works 40 hours a week as a waitress earning just \$20,000 annually. She aspires to attend OTC to receive training to work as a dental hygienist to increase her earning potential. If given the opportunity to complete the two-year program, she could soon find herself earning an average wage of over \$60,000 working in the high-demand health care sector. However, OTC is not able to accommodate the 150+ annual applicants to this program. If she is not one of just 17 students they can accommodate under their current funding structure, she along with many more won't even have the opportunity to enroll in the program.

Education, beginning with early childhood, is either an opportunity to be successful and advance earning potential or a lost opportunity that can lead to undesirable outcomes associated with poverty that affect individuals and communities. In the years ahead, educational achievement will be more necessary than ever before. Educators acknowledge that the traditional academic model must evolve through constant innovation and improved efficiencies in order to maintain educational offerings in spite of strained budgets. Community leaders must also wrestle with what can be done locally through collaborative approaches to prepare tomorrow's leaders.

“We’re changing lives, we really believe that.”

- Missy Riley
Springfield Public Schools

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2010 Community Leadership Visit



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Designed to be
an intense and
introspective study
of Springfield, the
visit gave participants
a chance to learn
about our community,
see new things and
challenge our own
assumptions about
this place we call
“home.”

