



“Weight of the Nation” viewers speak out

By Shelly Nichols, Director of Civic Engagement
Public Life Foundation of Owensboro

More than 400 Owensboro-Daviess County residents concerned about increasing obesity trends recently shared their impressions and recommendations following 52 public viewings of an HBO documentary across our community.

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The overarching themes that weaved through the comments:

- The problems are complex and there are no simple solutions.
- We need to attack this enemy on all fronts: nutrition, exercise/activity, portion sizes, public policies, etc.
- Despite obstacles to health and fitness (heredity, busy lifestyles, less recess at school, etc.), we must take responsibility for our weight.
- We need to inform the public about the severe health consequences that are rooted in obesity – especially for our youth

TO WIN, WE HAVE TO LOSE.

THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION

CONFRONTING AMERICA'S OBESITY EPIDEMIC

About the film

The Weight of the Nation is a highly acclaimed film that brought together the nation's leading research institutions: the Institute of Medicine, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and Kaiser Permanente.

The film examines case studies, interviews with our nation's leading experts, and individuals and their families struggling with obesity.

The first section, **Consequences**, examines the scope of the obesity epidemic and explores the serious health consequences of being overweight and obese.

The second, **Choices**, offers viewers the skinny on fat, revealing what science has shown about how to lose weight, maintain weight loss and prevent weight gain.

The third, **Children in Crisis**, documents the damage obesity is doing to our nation's children. Through individual stories, this film describes how the strong forces

at work in our society are causing children to consume too many calories and expend too little energy; tackling subjects from school lunches to the decline of physical education, the demise of school recess and the marketing of unhealthy food to children.

The fourth film, **Challenges**, examines the major driving forces causing the obesity epidemic, including agriculture, economics, evolutionary biology, food marketing, racial and socioeconomic disparities, physical inactivity, American food culture, and the strong influence of the food and beverage industry.

The local advisory committee members included representatives of:

Green River District Health Department
Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation
Public Life Foundation of Owensboro
Owensboro Health
Owensboro Family YMCA
Junior League of Owensboro



Views of the people

Participants reflected a cross section of the community that, while not a scientific sample, included diverse opinions and feedback. Nurses, college students, educators, pastors, dieticians, factory workers, and stay-at-home moms were just a few of the participants. Their ages ranged from 19-65.

The following remarks were made during the discussion periods after the public viewings:

Comments

- It becomes harder to make changes the older we get: metabolism slows down.
- Family influences are a big factor: Tradition/Environments/Hereditry.
- Childhood influences: Poverty levels, less opportunities, less physical activity, technology is at their fingertips.
- People have transportation issues, so they are grocery shopping at convenience stores and gas stations.
- Better food choices. Watch out for high fructose corn syrup, sugar, colas, fast food, processed foods.
- Lack of education. We must educate ourselves about our bodies.
- Correlations with technology – kids are not outside playing but sedentary playing video games or handheld devices.
- Convenience is the culture of the new generation.
- We are responsible for our children not eating healthy.
- Potlucks/gatherings – need to challenge each other to make them healthier.
- Weight problems with children need to be addressed early.
- Owensboro is the "fast food capital."
- Surprised about children having type 2 diabetes, orthopedic issues, asthma and fatty liver disease

We discipline with exercise and reward with junk food!



due to obesity.

- More children are obese now than ever before.
- Other factors like crime and healthcare come into play.
- Portions are out of control.
- Food stamps should only be used for food staples, need to push Congress/government to go back to this.
- Emotional eating – stress eating, as well as celebrating with food.
- We eat when we are bored.
 - For the first time, parents will live longer than their children.
 - There is discrimination where obesity is concerned – job interviews, peers, bullying.
 - Do people use their genetics as an excuse to not eat right or not exercising?
- Is it possible to make healthy choices and change in spite of genetics?
- Will it really make a difference?
- Is surgical intervention the only option for these people?
- Children used to be malnourished – now they are overnourished.
- People just need to get up and move – sedentary lifestyles.
- Smaller, leaner people can have unhealthy habits too.
- You don't have to be large to be unhealthy.

Recommended action steps

Most participants acknowledge that obesity is a complex issue, and more than a personal issue. They point to stakeholders who need to work together: schools, parents, communities and more.

Personal Responsibility

- Exercise more – not with equipment, but with our bodies.
- Drink more water instead of soda and sports drinks.
- Shop in the hunter/gatherer section of the grocery store.
- Walk and/or bike to work.
- Watch what you are eating – pay attention. Portion control is key.
- Use our already great resources – parks, greenbelt and HealthPark.

Parents/Guardians Responsibility

- Learn how to cook – take a cooking class.
- Develop a meal plan each week.
- Make good choices for your family meals.
- Stop using the television as your babysitter.
- Be a good role model for your kids – get moving.
- Limit your children's "screen time" – that includes television as well as hand held gaming devices.
- Stop serving processed foods.
- Discourage fast food meals.
- Discourage sodas and sports drinks. Keep cold water in the refrigerator for the kids.

Schools Responsibility

- Stop using junk food as a reward.
- Stop using physical activity as discipline.
- Don't give children the option of unhealthy school lunches.
- Bring in fresh local foods for the children – farmer's markets.
- Complain about too much junk food advertising and the availability of junk food at school.
- Make recess mandatory! No matter what age.
- Older kids can use Wii Fit, Just Dance, or motion-driven games.
- Market healthy foods in schools.
- Use healthy cooking cookbooks – free or available as fundraiser.
- Encourage schools to open gyms on Saturdays.



- Encourage coaches to promote healthy eating and avoid junk food.

Workplace Responsibility

- Establish "wellness" programs at workplaces.
- Promote healthy eating and exercise.

Community Responsibility

- Educate parents (activities, cooking classes, financial literacy) - UK Extension office.
- Teach parents how to meal plan and budget - UK Extension office.
- Communicate about healthy options – OMHS or HealthPark.
- Encourage the use of farmers markets.
- Establish year round farmers markets – We Are Downtown.
- Establish a Coalition for Public Change – could begin as a wellness movement that advocates for change!!!
- Educate the public about emotional eating – Overeaters Anonymous (Support Group).
- Encourage local vendors to use farmers markets.
- Involve health providers in assessing our community needs.
- Promote farmers markets – promote Reid's Orchard – promote Trunnels!
- Start a "Borrow a Bike" program.

Local Government Responsibility

- Enhance local parks with more wellness programs and use venues for opportunities to educate!
- Support community wellness "Action Plan."
- Build a skateboard park.
- Build a walk trail on the riverfront in Owensboro.
- Oppose lobbying efforts that favor fast, unhealthy foods. Promote policy change.

Conclusions

The public viewings of the “Weight of the Nation” documentary film brought forth robust dialogue. Challenges appear daunting. There are no easy answers. However, this information can be a valuable component of a community health plan. In such a plan, a coalition of local public health officials, governments, educators, families and more need to:

1. Evaluate and select the most promising action steps.
2. Identify who can do what to advance the plan.
3. Agree on an ambitious yet attainable timeline.

Advisory Committee for Project:

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Daviess County Public Schools board member and Green River District Health Dept.





Early childhood education: challenges and opportunities

Cuts and more cuts: are they warranted?

In Kentucky, it is a constitutional obligation of state government to provide a system of public education. The system strives to be equitable through adjustable funding formulas so that all 120 counties have an appropriate amount of money to operate their schools.

However, only 25 percent of children enter school ready to learn. *(Terry Tolen, Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council; John Roden, Kentucky River Foothill Development Council)*

Recognizing the importance of quality preschool programs, school districts, state and federal governments have supported all-day kindergarten and early childhood education programs. However, since 2008, state funding has declined from \$4,092 to \$3,191 per student, a 22 percent reduction.

Recently, the state childcare assistance program was cut by 57 percent. The across-the-board federal budget cuts (the “sequester”) is expected to mean \$424 million in cuts to early childhood education nationwide, 14,000 layoffs and 70,000 children would lose access to Head Start.

Early childhood education is not without its critics. Quality programs are expensive and outcomes can be difficult to measure.

- **Are these vital public services?**
- **Are government funds (local, state, federal) justified? If so, at what level?**
- **Are recent proposed budget cuts overdue or will they cost us more in the long term?**



Current utilization of early childhood resources

In Daviess County (including Owensboro), there are nearly 6,700 youth from birth to four years of age. Many of these youth, plus other local preschoolers, are served by the following early childhood facilities and programs:

- **Non-Profit Child Care**

Number of nonprofit licensed centers and certified homes:

35 facilities serving 1,070 youth

(includes Head Start, churches, school-based and other nonprofits)

- **For-Profit Child Care**

Number of for-profit licensed centers and certified homes:

28 facilities serving 1,605 youth

Forty-five of these facilities receive state subsidies.

Care provided by family, friends and neighbors is not included.

Social Factors

Other local agencies and organizations address various obstacles to learning by focusing on:

- School readiness
- Public policy (through advocacy)
- Child care provider training
- Foster care
- “At-risk” students
- Disabilities (physical, social, emotional)
- Child care quality
- Health and safety
- Gaps in services, collaboration
- Home visitation
- Parental involvement, training
- Dental care
- Health exams
- Reading
- Prenatal care
- Support groups
- Mental health
- Abuse and neglect
- Poverty
- Births to mothers without a high school degree

Leaders respond to early childhood education challenges

Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear and the state legislature have taken steps to support the cause by...

- creating a uniform definition of kindergarten readiness
- creating new statewide kindergarten readiness screenings
- creating the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Advisory Council
- earmarking funds through the tobacco settlement

Case Study: Is Head Start an effective program?



Head Start is a federal program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Head Start provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition and parent involvement programs to low income children and their families.

Three Head Start programs serve 520 children in Owensboro-Daviess County at a cost of \$3.9 million per year.

- **Early Start serves 96 children (0-3 years of age)**
Annual cost: \$11,500 per child
- **Migrant Head Start serves 44 children (0-5 years of age)**
Annual cost: \$10,441 per child
- **Head Start serves 380 children (3-4 years of age)**
Annual cost: \$6,000 per child

In 2010, the HHS released the results of a rigorous evaluation of 5,000 three-and-four year-olds entering Head Start and tracked through the first grade.

The findings have been interpreted differently.



Proponents of Head Start say ...

- Head Start children outperformed control groups in every domain that the HHS Head Start Impact Study measured, including positive cognitive, social-emotional, health and parenting impacts. They were more ready for school than their peers in the control group.
- Quality preschool programs develop skills that are essential in the workplace: impulse control, anger management, collaboration – skills that are difficult to learn as a teenager or young adult.
- Those who participated in quality preschool are less likely to get arrested, more likely to have jobs, and it saves the government money in the long term.
- Head Start kids are less likely to need special education services; less likely to repeat grades; more likely to graduate from high school, go to college and get jobs; less likely to commit crimes and go to jail; and they live healthier longer lives.

Opponents of Head Start counter and say...

- Head Start is an \$8 billion per year program, one of 69 federal preschool programs. Since its inception in 1965, taxpayers have spent more than \$180 billion on the program.
- The HHS Impact Study concluded that any benefits the children may have accrued while in the Head Start program had dissipated by the time they reached the first grade.
- Head Start failed to improve literary, math and language skills. It had little to no impact on cognitive, social-emotional, health or parenting practices of its participants.
- HHS officials sat on the results for four years.

“When a child cannot read in the third grade, you can go ahead and reserve their jail cell.”

Sherry Baber, Director
Hager Preschool Center

“Head Start doesn’t need more money. It needs to be put on the chopping block...”

Lindsey Burke
Heritage Foundation analyst

Community Choices

While the debate continues regarding the effectiveness of Head Start and other early childhood education programs, what do we do in Owensboro-Daviess County? Are these programs cost-effective? ...worth saving? ...worth expanding? Is this an appropriate role for government? Money is tight in Frankfort, school boards are reluctant to raise taxes, and with all the cuts to education in recent years, it is difficult to shift funds from other needs.

What choices do we have? Which choices reflect the values we want to characterize our community?

1. Leave early childhood education to parents and guardians.



This option reflects a shift to personal responsibility. Some analysts and organizations are challenging the effectiveness of these programs. With parenting comes the responsibility of caring for children, including the responsibility of preparing them for school. We need to focus our limited public resources on traditional elementary and secondary school children.

2. Improve and expand facilities and programs.

Despite all the efforts underway, only one in four children is prepared for school. If we ignore these children, we will pay for it later when they have difficulties or fail in school, when they drop out, or when they get in trouble with few prospects. These children are not responsible for their circumstances and deserve a chance to succeed in school and life. Studies have indicated that early



childhood education is the “best bang for the buck” when it comes to making an impact. We should improve and expand critical learning skill development, pre-reading readiness, socialization and more. We must aggressively advocate for federal, state and local support to meet this need.

3. Develop innovative ways to stimulate a culture of learning.



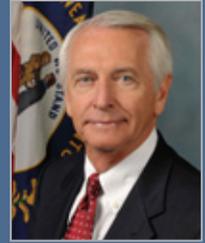
Rather than focus on specific learning skills, we need a more comprehensive approach. We need to be a community that values lifelong learning, where children are read to frequently, where there are outings and social experiences, trips to museums and plays. When learning is valued in the home, education will be valued in our community, resulting in support of education, small classes, appropriate compensation for teachers, continuing education to introduce new learning models, and more.



4. Help youth overcome barriers to learning and barriers to healthy social relationships.

Even at a young age, many of our youth carry baggage. A parent might be an alcoholic or in prison. A child or his mother may be a victim of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. (In Daviess County last year, there were 650 substantiated cases of child abuse.) There may not be money for healthy food or shoes that fit or clothing so children won't be teased. Some children bounce around from one foster home to another, or they may be homeless and living in a shelter. When the real problem is a dysfunctional home, choices one-through-three are not likely to help.

“Nothing will have more impact on the future of this state (than early childhood development)... we will continue restructuring our preschool and day care programs to ensure every child is mentally and physically prepared for kindergarten the day he or she enters the classroom.”



– Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear

“Research shows that every public dollar spent on high quality early childhood education returns \$7 through increased productivity and savings on public assistance and criminal justice programs.”



– President Barack Obama

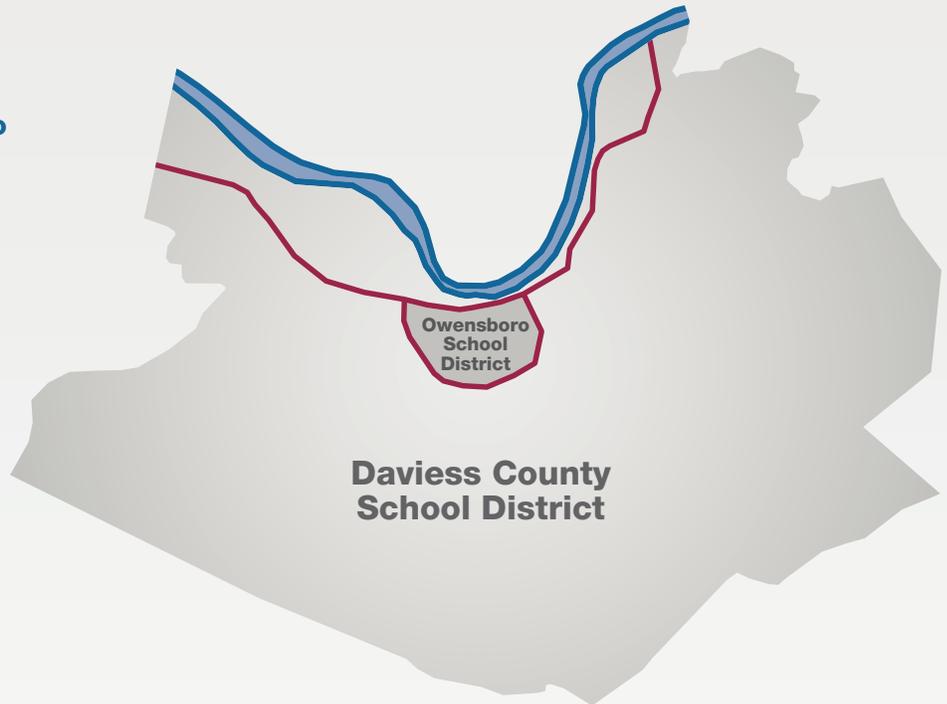
Discussion Questions

- What are your impressions of the early childhood education issue? Did you find anything that was surprising or disturbing? What values should influence our policies and actions?
- What were your impressions of the four community choices that were presented? Which are you inclined to support; which ones are you inclined to oppose? Can you offer another option?
- When it comes to early childhood education, what should be our community priorities? Where should the money come from to advance that priority?
- If funds were available from a corporate contributions committee, charitable trust, or foundation, how would you like to see the funds used? ... if \$10,000 were available, if 100,000 were available?

School district consolidation: Let there be dialogue

If the Owensboro Public Schools Board of Education jumps right into the selection process for a new city school district superintendent to replace Larry Vick, will it be another 10, 15 or more years before the issue of city-county school unification is discussed?

Would it be more responsible to postpone the selection process until there is meaningful community dialogue on this issue?



- What options are available to school districts?
- What might consolidation involve?
- Where has it occurred?
- What have been the experiences of other communities that have combined school districts?
- Have some consolidated districts reverted to separate districts?
- What is the case for consolidation? Efficiencies? Tax fairness?
- What is the case for keeping things the same? If it ain't broke...? Healthy competition between the districts?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?
- What are the costs and consequences, the drawbacks, the tradeoffs?

Before we set it aside, is it the appropriate time to at least discuss this important community issue?

Youth leader cites key problems



Steve Winkler, former teacher, coach, principal and now executive director of the Cliff Hagan Boys and Girls Club, recently met with a group of concerned citizens to share his perspective on the key challenges facing youth in our community.

Steve brings more than 20 years experience working with youth, including an expansion to three agency sites in Owensboro and Rockport, Ind. More than 2,000

kids pay a dollar a month for a safe haven, a place to have fun, exercise, enjoy a healthy snack, get help with homework, and more.

Most of the Cliff Hagan Boys and Girls Club members are great kids who are well on their way to a healthy and satisfying future. Parents, friends, teachers, coaches and others are nurturing mentors. However, Steve cites the following unsettling trends:

1. The breakdown of the family

Steve sees an increasing number of children from single parent homes, grandparents raising grandchildren, children that bounce around between foster homes, children on-and-off their medications, children who don't know who to trust.

2. Children – and families – who don't value education

According to Steve, we need a cultural change. We need parents and guardians who will instill a value of education and lifelong learning. We need to help children imagine possibilities for themselves.

3. Children and families who are unhealthy

Steve sees far too many obese children. Many parents/guardians set poor examples and are too busy to sit down for a family meal. Children are bombarded by media messages to buy soft drinks, candy and more. Many are confused and need guidance about sexuality.

4. Lack of respect

Too many children do not respect their elders, each other, or themselves. They have a poor work ethic. Many are materialistic. They feel entitled and do not have an obligation to give back.

5. External pressures

Many children face pressures every day. Pressure to fit in, to use drugs, to deal with bullies (physical and emotional), to associate with the wrong crowd.

These are the kinds of things that the staff and volunteers of the Boys and Girls Club deal with regularly. The local Boys and Girls Club complements the work of Girl's, Inc., H.L. Neblett Community Center, Dugan Best Community Center, Boy/Girl Scouts, YMCA, school- and church-based programs to offer hope and encouragement for at-risk children.

Particularly in a time when funding is limited and programs are cut, service agencies need to demonstrate a commitment to efficiency and collaboration so that governmental, corporate, individual, civic and philanthropic donors can be assured that there is minimal duplication and that our community is working together effectively.

The most expensive Congress money can buy

Did you know that...

- The House races last fall cost more than a billion dollars.
- It took more than \$700 million to elect a third of the senate.
- The two presidential candidates each raised more than a billion dollars.
- The total amount spent on the 2012 election exceeded the number of people on this planet – some seven billion dollars.

Most of it didn't come from the average Joe and Jane.

- 60 percent of all super PAC donations came from 159 people.
- The top 32 super PAC donors gave an average of \$9.9 million.
- The pharmaceutical and health-care products industries, combined with organizations representing doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, health services and HMOs, spent \$5.36 billion since 1998 on lobbying in Washington.

Think how many teachers that would hire.

Will we ever know where all this money came from?

- One-third of the billion dollars from outside groups was secret money anonymously funneled through fictional “social welfare” organizations.

Does the money really make a difference?

- More than 80 percent of the House candidates and two-thirds of Senate candidates who outspent their general election opponents came out on top.

The problem transcends political parties:

- House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) led his party to protect Wall Street from oversight and accountability. The finance, insurance, and real estate industries gave him more than \$3 million last year.
- Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's (D-New York) largest contributors included JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs and law firms that have advised her.

- Eric Cantor (R-Virginia), House Majority Leader, was the third largest recipient of money from the National Rifle Association and Goldman Sachs was one of his largest donors.
- Senator Robert Menendez (D-New Jersey) is under investigation for allegations that he improperly intervened with government agencies on behalf of a large donor.
- Chairman of the House Energy & Commerce Committee, Fred Upton (R-Michigan), raised \$4 million to win re-election, to a great extent with donations from the oil and gas industry.
- Senator Chuck Schumer's (D-New York) top donors include securities and investment firms, law firms, and lobbyists.
- Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), Senator Orin Hatch (R-Utah), and Senator Max Baucus (D-Montana) have been cited by the *New York Times* for inappropriate deals with pharmaceutical giant Amgen. In the past five years, Amgen has been one of the top 10 donors to these three legislators.
- During his bid for a second term, President Obama attended a fund raiser every 60 hours and broke fund raising records.

The influence of money could thwart everything the president proposed in his State of the Union address, but there was no mention about taming the power of private money over public policy.

How will history judge this era?

Sources:

Moyers, Bill, “Democracy for Dollars,” <http://billmoyers.com/wp-content/themes/billmoyers/transcript-print.php?post=24882>

<http://healthland.time.com/2013/02/20bitter-pill-why-medical-bills-are-killing-us/print/print>

Setting a higher standard for educational attainment

During the 2013 state legislative session, a bill was proposed in the Kentucky House of Representatives that would phase-in an increase in public school compulsory attendance from 16 to 18 years of age. The Senate countered with a bill that would make it a local option.

Is there a case for increasing the dropout age statewide?

- More than 6,000 young Kentuckians drop out of high school every year.
- Eighty percent of those who are incarcerated in Kentucky do not have a high school education.
- Twenty-eight states have increased the minimum dropout age to 18.
- The age of 16 was established in 1920 and driven largely by an agricultural economy.
- The military is not an option for those without a high school degree.
- Eighty-five percent of parents support increasing the dropout age to 18.
- All 120 counties have alternative schools or some form of alternative programs.

It may cost more to keep marginal or disruptive students enrolled. But if it were only about money, why not make 15 the minimum dropout age? That's because we know that jobs that pay a livable wage require at least a high school education. Without a high school diploma, it is immensely difficult and stressful to provide for a family.

To offer hope to our young people and give distinction to our community in order to attract quality employers, we need an educated work force. Rather than back off this challenge, why not raise the bar and embrace a more ambitious challenge? Let's not set the minimum dropout age at 16 years of age or even 18, let's make an associate degree the minimum educational attainment standard for Owensboro-Daviess County.

Mandatory compliance would not likely be practical, but

to embrace and promote such a notion would give our community distinction, stimulate economic development, and improve the prospects of hundreds if not thousands of students each year.

Several organizations and community leaders have proposed ways to ensure access to an associate degree for all high school students in Owensboro-Daviess County. By putting our heads together and by learning from comparable initiatives, we can make it happen here as well.

Author of city-county school study dies

Mark D. Dartt, educator, researcher, and author of a study on the challenges facing the Owensboro and Daviess County school districts, passed away at Deaconess Hospital in Newburgh, Indiana on February 4, 2013.



The study, an initiative of the Citizens Committee on Education and funded by the Public Life Foundation, examined how fixed boundaries affect the student population and finances of our two local public school systems.

Dartt, 69, of Tell City, served as teacher, principal, and superintendent of schools in Indiana, Kentucky and California. He was also director of Institutional Research at Kentucky Wesleyan College, university registrar at Jacksonville (Fla.) University and coordinator of the Daviess-Henderson County Juvenile Delinquency Council.

He is survived by his wife, Charlotte (Strahl) Dartt, three sons, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.