

Enabling Citizens to Make a Difference

How does our community solve problems? How do we seize opportunities? How can the public have a stronger sense of ownership and make a greater impact in public affairs?

Toward those ends, the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro embraces, promotes, and facilitates a three-pronged process:

information → deliberation → action

To learn that public issues affect them personally, citizens need reliable information, presented in a form that everyone can understand. To form responsible judgments, citizens must come together to listen, share, and understand all points of view. And to take action effectively, citizens may need assistance to organize, mobilize, or initiate projects.

In 2003, our Foundation worked with citizens on an array of public issues: education to health care, disadvantaged youth to community appearance and design, race and ethnic relations to international issues.

We researched and shared findings, engaged citizens in dialogue, and supported groups that want to make a difference. We stood up for principles of openness and accountability in our public and nonprofit institutions. And as a result, more citizens are involved and better equipped to make a difference.

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Major Initiatives 2003

ACTIVISM & ADVOCACY

2003 Activities



The Foundation encouraged, assisted, and supported public participation through our work with six established organizations and citizens organized on an ad hoc basis around specific issues. We provided one-on-one consultation to leaders, staff, members, committees and task forces. We provided administrative and financial support.

We also organized and conducted a civic action workshop for a broader group of nonprofit leaders to inform them of tools (including legislative lobbying activities) available to community organizations.

Outcomes

- The Citizens Committee on Education, Citizens Health Care Advocates, Goodfellows Club, PRIDE, Unity Coalition, and the Owensboro Area World Affairs Council continue to improve, expand, and are better positioned for the future.
- Hundreds of citizens discovered opportunities for community service through these organizations, and thousands more participated in workshops, forums, focus groups, surveys, and campaigns conducted by them.
- Leaders from more than 20 organizations are better equipped to expand their role and effectiveness as advocates and activists.

CHILDREN

Goodfellows Club



2003 Activities

The Foundation provided office space and administrative support for the Goodfellows Club (established in 1916). The Foundation president serves on the board of directors, leads the annual planning retreat, and co-chairs a committee. Other PLFO staff and a Foundation director also serve on the board. In 2003, the Goodfellows added a benefit tennis tournament and expanded the “Soup Day for Kids” promotion in local workplaces.

Outcomes

- More than 100 volunteers involved.
- Annual “Roll Call” campaign attracted more than 1,000 donations and nearly \$90,000.
- Working through local schools, the Goodfellows served more than 1,000 disadvantaged children (shoes, clothing, and emergency assistance) and more than 1,000 children attended the traditional Christmas Eve party.
- Provided financial support for a new dental care initiative for disadvantaged youth.

COMMUNITY APPEARANCE & DESIGN

PRIDE (Public Responsibility in Designing our Environment)



2003 Activities

The Foundation provided office space, staff, administrative and financial support to this grass roots organization that seeks to improve the appearance of our community through citizen involvement.

Outcomes

- Administrative progress: 407 members, 10 active committees, regular guest speakers, successful fund-raising events.
- More than 380 participants in 20 “Crafting a Vision for Community Design” workshops.
- Increased awareness, networking, and citizen influence regarding the aesthetic impact of transportation projects, city entrance signs, medians, public buildings, parks, public art, planning and zoning policies, major landmarks (bridge, water tower), and more.
- Established an annual awards program.
- Lifted the sense of possibilities by visiting and examining programs from other cities (e.g., Columbus, Indiana).

EDUCATION

Citizens Committee on Education (CCE)



2003 Activities

The Foundation provided work space for CCE volunteers and records, administrative and financial support. The Foundation president also serves in a CCE leadership capacity.

The CCE has and is focused on three priorities:

1. the growing disparities between the Owensboro and Daviess County Public Schools (student population, tax rates, tax base, and finances)
2. the need for a community plan for higher education
3. the need to instill a higher cultural value of education and learning

Outcomes

- The CCE met monthly; committees convened as needed to manage projects. Guest speakers kept members abreast of issues facing education in our community.
- The Foundation and the CCE released a study of financial and student population trends of the Owensboro and Daviess County Public Schools. Public presentations-discussions were followed by specific recommendations, including: an objective examination of the advantages and disadvantages of consolidating the two systems, increased short-term collaboration (e.g., calendars, transportation).
- The CCE requested proposals from leading national firms for a study to determine needs and opportunities for higher education in Owensboro-Daviess County. The Washington-based NORED firm (William Chance, Ph.D.) was selected.
- A CCE task force, coordinated by volunteer project manager Mimi Davis, Ph.D., crafted the Learning Community program. This grass roots effort will energize groups, employers, families, churches, and others to instill a deeper cultural appreciation of education and lifelong learning.
- To date, CCE members have raised more than \$50,000 for these CCE projects.

HEALTH CARE

Access to Health Care



2003 Activities

The Foundation established task forces, convened and facilitated meetings to explore ways to make prescription drugs and medical transportation more accessible. We supported a proposal to fund a health department clinic to serve residents of public housing and homeless shelters. We also raised awareness for the need for a coordinated community plan for clinics, prescription drug assistance, and other services.

Outcomes

- Through GRITS, the first phase of a comprehensive computerized system is in place that connects people who need transportation with available resources.
- A Prescription Drug Service Center model, developed by the task force, is integrated into the proposed Daviess County Community Access Program (DC-CAP). Green River District Health Department will provide space in its new headquarters.

Health Care Advocacy Group

2003 Activities



The Foundation continued its support of Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA) by providing consultation, office space, and administrative support. Although less than two years old, CHCA has grown in numbers, visibility, credibility, and impact.

Outcomes

- CHCA attracted 92 members and more than 400 people to meetings.
- CHCA organized and conducted several forums and panel discussions on key health care issues.

- CHCA featured speakers from OMHS, health department, clinics, HealthPark, school nurses, and other key agencies and programs – and heightened awareness through public access channel broadcasts.
- CHCA issued an “Action Alert” encouraging citizens to share their views on the tobacco tax with state legislators.
- CHCA saluted compassionate health care professionals through its R.C. Neblett Service Awards program.
- CHCA hosted regular “Speak Out” sessions to enhance the public voice regarding health care concerns.
- CHCA members serve on committees, task forces; attend public meetings, conferences, and more.

Health Insurance Costs

2003 Activities



Responding to teachers and state employees who questioned why their health insurance premiums were higher in Daviess County than most other areas of Kentucky, the Foundation commissioned a study by former *Courier-Journal* reporter Fran Ellers to get to the bottom of it.

“Health Insurance Premiums in Daviess County” was distributed widely, adapted for community presentations, presented on public access television, and elements were published in a newspaper series.

Outcomes

- Citizens, organizations, and community leaders have a better understanding of local factors that drive health insurance premiums.
- Many citizens learned that hospital charges affect health care costs more than physician charges.
- Many citizens learned that only six percent of patients pay published hospital charges.
- The report underscored the need for our community to reduce utilization of the health care system, redirect more care from the emergency room to primary care, and develop an effective community plan toward healthier lifestyle choices.
- State employees and teachers still have only one health insurance choice, but a new provider, Humana, introduced significantly lower premiums into this market.

Hospital Governance and Policies

2003 Activities



Following the buyout of Catholic Health Partners, officials were faced with restructuring the governance of our community hospital, Owensboro Mercy Health System (OMHS). They welcomed public input, but citizens needed more information regarding all the options – presented clearly and objectively – to understand the importance of the matters at hand. Should our hospital be a public or private institution? How should the governing body be selected? How can the new OMHS board ensure public trust and confidence?

Citizens needed a forum to examine issues and options thoroughly, to weigh advantages and disadvantages, to understand all points of view. The Foundation researched information, prepared materials, convened citizens from diverse backgrounds, and shared the results with hospital officials and elected officials. We commissioned two position papers and offered proposals on governance and citizen participation.

The Foundation also encouraged OMHS to be more accountable to the community. We encouraged and promoted public meetings, funded advertising and broadcasts of meetings and hearings on public access television. We urged OMHS officials to open meetings to the public, allow public comment, and disclose information beyond its minimal legal obligation as a private, nonprofit organization.

Legitimate questions raised by citizens – e.g., the rift between the administration and medical staff, the buyout of Catholic Health Partners, the suspension of a heart surgeon, high health insurance rates, changes in the substance abuse detoxification facility and school nurse program – warranted a more extensive public explanation. The Foundation was the conduit through which citizens shared their concerns.

Outcomes

- OMHS will continue as a private, nonprofit corporation, but there will be more public control through appointments from city and county government and a committee of community groups.
- An annual report to the community will be presented to a joint public meeting of city and county government.

- A Community Relations/Accountability Committee will be established.
- Approximately \$8 million in ODCH, Inc. (dissolved following the buyout) assets will be invested in community health.

Lifestyle Summit



2003 Activities

The University of Kentucky health needs assessment, funded in part by the Foundation (released in August 2000), stressed the connection between poor health and behavioral patterns in Daviess County and surrounding areas. Consequently, the Foundation proposed a community summit on healthy lifestyles to the Healthy Horizons task force and the Foundation president served on the steering committee.

Outcomes

- Approximately 200 citizens participated in the half-day summit, offering hundreds of ideas for ways to encourage healthy lifestyles (relating to diet, exercise, smoking) in homes and neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, clubs and organizations, and churches throughout the community. Results will be integrated into a five-year community plan.

OPENNESS & THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS



2003 Activities

The Foundation commenced plans for a statewide conference: “Openness, Transparency and the Public Interest,” tentatively scheduled for October 2004 in Louisville. Journalists, first amendment attorneys, scholars and others were named to an advisory committee. Project manager Bob Darrell will develop topics, recruit panelists, arrange facilities, and coordinate logistics. We hope for significant financial support from foundations connected with the state’s leading newspapers.

RACE-ETHNIC RELATIONS



Unity Coalition

2003 Activities

The coalition that came together a few years ago to organize a community response to a planned KKK rally continues to meet to examine racial-ethnic challenges facing our community. The Foundation convened and led meetings, invited guest presenters, and more. A recent program featured Ron Crouch, Kentucky State Data Center, who presented current comparisons on white-minority educational attainment, income, and employment, among other information.

Outcomes

- Enhanced dialogue between people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Enhanced awareness of issues, disparities, and challenges
- Enhanced working relationships between representatives of institutions and agencies that serve the minority community

WORLD AFFAIRS



2003 Activities

The Foundation provided leadership, financial and administrative support for the nascent Owensboro Area World Affairs Council.

We organized a community dialogue on Iraq and the Aftermath (using materials from the Public Conversations Project). We organized, promoted, and broadcast a public panel discussion (“When do we send in the troops?”) featuring representatives of local higher education institutions.

Outcomes

- The Council attracted 35 members
- Several hundred people attended Council programs
- Post-forum questionnaire results were shared with federal legislators

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC RELATIONS

2003 Activities



Web Site

The Foundation took steps to add an interactive dimension to its web site, www.plfo.org. This may include a process for subscribing to a new Foundation publication, contributing views, chatting with others regarding issues of concern, responding to surveys, and more.

Networking

The Foundation staff is active in many community organizations and is invited routinely to meetings, news conferences, banquets, receptions, ceremonies, and more. We serve on boards, committees and task forces; attend public meetings/hearings, conferences, workshops, and more. Elected officials and candidates for office turn to us for background on issues or to assist with community-wide campaigns.

Networking enhances our knowledge of community affairs, enriches relationships, and exposes more people to our work.

News Coverage

The work of our Foundation, and organizations we support, continues to attract considerable news coverage and editorial support.

TPI Panel

The Foundation was featured as a small city case study on advocacy in philanthropy during a TPI (The Philanthropic Initiative) panel discussion conducted in Boston. Our Foundation president was joined on the panel by CEO's of the Pew Charitable Trust, Hudson Institute, and Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Massachusetts.

Awards

Several agencies and community groups extended special recognition to the Foundation, including the Human Relations Commission, Neighborhood Alliance, PRIDE, Owensboro-Daviess County Parks Foundation, and others.

ADMINISTRATION

2003 Activities



Classification

The Foundation received certification of an IRS change in designation to an “operating” foundation. Although we may still award grants, this change reflects the foundation’s emphasis on self-directed projects, research, and support of citizen groups.

Strategic Planning

The Foundation retained consultant Maryl Levine to facilitate a strategic planning process. We supplemented this exercise with a survey to more than 80 opinion leaders from our community and beyond. Included in the initiatives resulting from these projects:

- The foundation will be adding more non-family directors to its board of directors
- The foundation will place greater emphasis on a “citizen-driven” model to underscore the importance of citizens and organizations setting their own agendas and embracing a stronger sense of ownership in their work.
- The foundation will develop a publication to better inform citizens of issues that affect their lives and their community.

Assets Management

A generous contribution from the John and Marjorie Hager Charitable Fund teamed with a market turn around to increase the Foundation corpus after a period of shrinkage. As of December 31, 2003 our account managers (Moran Group of Naples, Florida) reported Foundation assets at more than \$6.6 million.

Office Enhancements

Foundation employee Beverly Mills and volunteer designer Beth Simmons contributed their expertise and creativity to enhance our conference room décor.

Operating Enhancements

In 2003, the Foundation employed three full-time employees and one part-time employee. Operating and expenses totaled approximately \$350,000.

Committees

The Foundation expanded its committee system to include Technology, Budget-Financial, Personnel, Strategic Planning, Communications, and more.

Public Life Foundation of Owensboro

Our Mission

The Public Life Foundation seeks to build a stronger foundation for public life. We promote broad-based public dialogue and deliberation, grounded in solid research, to resolve important community issues.

Our Values

The central value of the Public Life Foundation is DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. Democratic process empowers informed citizens to discuss issues, seek solutions, and create a better community.

Several additional values play a critical role in this democratic process.

OPENNESS – enhances citizens’ access to information, their participation in deliberation, and their ability to assess public institutions.

JUSTICE – requires that all citizens have equal access to information and deliberation – and an equal voice in policy decisions.

STEWARDSHIP – asks responsible leaders to strengthen public institution by encouraging citizen involvement.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS – mobilize people on behalf of the common good.

When these values are fostered, the outcome is more likely to be an ETHICAL COMMUNITY that solves problems by overcoming divisions between rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural, liberal and conservative.

Our Work

We promote a three-pronged process for community problem solving:

INFORMATION – Citizens need reliable data, reports, and research, presented in a form that can be understood by everyday citizens.

DELIBERATION – To form sound judgments, citizens must come together and examine issues, opposing points of view, problems, and possibilities. The voices of all must be valued and encouraged.

EMPOWERMENT-ACTION – Once informed and engaged, once citizens are ready to act, they may need assistance to organize, mobilize support, or initiate programs.

Our Founders and Governing Body

The foundation was established by the John S. Hager family following the sale of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer* in 1996.

The governing board includes family members: John Hager, Marjorie Hager, Susie Alford, Denny Alford, Sally Wood, and Bruce Hager, as well as non-family members: David Adkisson, former Owensboro Mayor and currently President of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce; Dave Boeyink, former *Messenger-Inquirer* Editorial Page Editor and currently Professor of Journalism at Indiana University; William Speciale, David L. Babson & Company; and Rodney Berry, the foundation President.

How You Can Reach Us

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