

## Discovering a Quality of Life

### *What Greencastle can Learn from the Midwest's Best Communities*

The progressive revitalization of many Midwestern towns and the development of new, planned communities may present competition for Greencastle, but they also inspire ideas. "People have developed higher expectations of their hometown and lifestyle," observed Greg Bennington, President of the Greater Greencastle Chamber of Commerce. "Other communities and developers are spending millions of dollars to build planned neighborhoods, restaurants, and retail developments to recreate the quality of life that has been part of Greencastle for decades."

The trend of creating towns has been labeled "New Urbanism," the beginning of which is believed by many to be the first master planned community in 1981, Seaside, Florida. Today, more than 330 communities throughout the country are embracing New Urban principles, and dozens more are planned.

In a July 10, 2005 article *Indianapolis Star* article about the spread of New Urbanism to Indiana, J.K. Wall said, "think of them as small towns on steroids." The first Indiana development to try the concept was the Village of West Clay in Carmel. At least four others are planned: the Anson project north of Zionsville, the Saxony project between Noblesville and Fishers, and Ackerson Farms and Eagle Station near Westfield. In the same article, Wall states that studies have shown housing costs to be up to 15 percent more than in traditional subdivisions, and developers have found these types of communities tend to thrive mostly in higher-income areas. The Congress for the New Urbanism, founded in part by Seaside's planners, has published data that says retiring baby boomers and people 25 to 35 are the groups that most prefer these denser, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods.

Press coverage of New Urbanism has been extensive; the *Star* covered the trend again in its May 21, 2006 Focus section. Urban planners and architects however, have mixed feelings. Doug McCash, in

#### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

A sampling of community assets

#### **RECREATION**

Big Walnut Sports Park  
Youth Sports Leagues  
DePauw Nature Park  
Indiana State Parks  
Greencastle Parks/  
Recreation Programs  
People Pathways  
Area Covered Bridges

#### **CULTURE/ARTS**

Putnam County Playhouse  
DePauw Theatre Series  
Putnam County Museum  
Putnam County Library  
Putnam County Artist  
Community

#### **BUSINESS ASSETS**

Putnam County Airport &  
Dixie Chopper Business  
Center  
Location, Location, Location  
Historic Courthouse Square  
Water/ Sewage Infrastructure  
Wired community, high  
speed Internet  
Planned Ivy Tech State  
College Campus  
Industrial Site Availability

the November 14, 2005 issue of the *Times-Picayune*, writes, “Admirers find New Urbanism to be an attractive, ecologically responsible alternative to the never-ceasing cycle of suburban single-story, petroleum-dependent blight, or the denser, dirtier cities that the suburbanites were fleeing. Detractors see New Urbanism as the diabolical Disneyfication of America; artificial, superficial, and soulless.” Like it or not, Indiana towns might have something to learn from large developers that have identified a consumer craving and have been successful at satisfying it.

The “New Urbanism “ is in response to the idea that suburban Americans miss certain aspects of community life, like walking to the corner store and chatting with neighbors at the curb. Residents of Greencastle and many other historic Indiana towns may think these features sound quite familiar. New Urban villages differ from typical suburban developments by incorporating historic architecture, walkable areas, nearby businesses, residential greens, village plazas, market squares, narrower streets, smaller lots, row houses, and front porches. The issue is that people today *expect* more, and don’t care that their own community may offer typical amenities for its size.

From the surveys conducted by the Hometown Greencastle Alliance, there is evidence that both Central Indiana and local residents perceive there to be few of these desirable attributes in Greencastle. However, the perception in this case does not necessarily match the reality. “Therein is the challenge for Hometown Greencastle, community leadership, and citizens,” expressed Sue Murray, President of the Putnam County Community Foundation. “How does the community stabilize our economic and social foundations, including government and non-profits, improve our awareness of our quality of life, and create a vision of the future?”

“In my business I travel extensively and the communities I visit have amenities unique to their regions,” said Dave Murray, Alliance member and President of the National Center for College Costs. “In looking at my hometown from the outside, I’m always thankful to live in a community like Greencastle because of its assets.” F2/Inc., the consultant team working on the Hometown Greencastle marketing and development plan, discovered that Greencastle and Putnam County have a surprising number of positive features when compared to other Central Indiana communities outside of Marion County.

The Putnam County Playhouse is a community secret, and Greencastle is home to a number of resident artists. The array of opportunities provided by DePauw to enjoy theatre, performing arts programs, arts exhibitions, world leaders, nationally-known lecturers and authors mean local residents enjoy a richer and more diverse schedule of cultural activities than many neighboring cities and towns. Residents can also enjoy numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation locally and

nearby; covered bridges; and a rich heritage now being displayed by the developing Putnam County Museum. Greencastle also offers more independent and ethnic restaurants and retailers per capita when compared with the other towns in the area.

In researching other model communities, John Goss, F2, Inc. discovered college towns across the country are to recognizing the significance of a genuine community setting and the assets provided by the naturally rural and safe environment. “The success of these communities is the ability for the urban, rural, and educational populations to recognize success in cooperation,” observed John. “An example of shared resources is how the DePauw University campus size recently tripled with the donation and development of the DePauw Nature Park, an outdoor environmental and geological educational facility on Greencastle’s western boundary offering nine miles of trails for public enjoyment. “

Oberlin, Ohio markets itself as “Ohio’s Best College Town,” highlighting affordability, quality housing and health care and low taxes. The town takes great pride in the cultural amenities of Oberlin College where more than 1,500 concerts, films, lectures, dance, theatre and opera productions are available to local residents. Cleveland, located about 40 miles from Oberlin, provides easy access to shopping, dining, sports, culture and other attractions of a major metro area. But Oberlin, with a population of 8,100, has succeeded by supporting a strong local business district with a wide range of dining, specialty shopping, and arts related businesses.

Similar examples are Wilmington, Ohio, the home of Wilmington College, voted “Most Livable Neighborhood” by Cincinnati Magazine for friendliness, affordable housing, low tax rates, education, shopping and dining. Wilmington is a Main Street Community and a county seat that embraces the college campus and markets a lifestyle with small town values. In Iowa, the town of Decorah is home to Luther College and is best known for its Nordic Fest and Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum. Even though it is a small historic town, art galleries and fine dining make this county seat with a thriving campus of 2, 600 students a great place to visit or live.

Cities and towns are ranked nationally by dozens of sources according to many, many criteria. There are lists of best places to live, best places to raise a family, the most affordable places, the best places for retirement, even the best places for telecommuters. Indianapolis was recently named as #5 on the “hot cities for entrepreneurs” list by entrepreneur.com; Lafayette/West Lafayette and Bloomington are in the top 50 of the 331 metropolitan areas ranked by Sperling’s Best Places; larger cities, but within commuting distance of Greencastle.

Greencastle has made a few lists as well. Greencastle appears in Norman Crampton's book, *The 100 Best Small Towns in America*. And Forbes Publisher Rich Karlgaard selected Greencastle as one of six small university towns with under 20,000 in population that are best suited for business owners or managers who can do their job without being on site. In a recent book, *Life 2.0: How People Across America are Transforming Their Lives by Finding the Where of Their Happiness*, Karlgaard cites university towns as the place where many of today's entrepreneurial types are driven by access to intellectual capital.

DePauw also raises Greencastle's profile to a national level, as the university and the city in which it is located are mentioned in dozens of national publications each month. Senator Evan Bayh's recent commencement address at DePauw is being rebroadcast nationally by C-SPAN, just one example of how people are hearing about Greencastle because of the university's prominence and success. DePauw has ranked in U.S. News & World Report's top tier of national liberal arts colleges for six consecutive years, is ranked eighth nationally as an undergraduate source of business leaders and is noted by several publications as among America's best values.

Greencastle has assets, and they are unique to this city. Identifying them and deciding, as a community, what is important to us as we move forward is a key step toward building a stronger economic base, better neighborhoods, and a place that will be even more attractive to the citizens of today, and the new people who are attracted to Greencastle in the years to come. This means learning about our assets and challenges and working on Greencastle's appeal and its sense of place together. "I have always believed that a business has more to fear from internal inefficiency, than any outside competition," related Ken Eitel, facilitator of the Hometown Greencastle Alliance. "Our future depends not so much on copying other communities but on discovering our community's heart."

Tomorrow's fifth and final story will consider how Greencastle, Putnam County, and DePauw University can work together toward that shared community vision.

This is the fourth in a series of five stories that has appeared daily this week and will conclude Saturday to share the research findings and early conclusions from Phase I of the Hometown Greencastle Alliance's marketing and development plan with the greater Greencastle community. The series can also be accessed on line at [www.bannergraphic.com](http://www.bannergraphic.com). or [www.gogreencastle.com](http://www.gogreencastle.com).

An essential part of Phase II includes collecting continued feedback from residents. A community information session will be held Thursday, June 8, 2006, 6:00-7:30 p.m. at the Greencastle Middle

School. The public is invited to attend. Further, residents can also send comments and suggestions via e-mail to Greencastle Chamber of Commerce at [gchamber@ccrtc.com](mailto:gchamber@ccrtc.com) (???)

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