

Greencastle's Future: The Opportunities and Challenges

5 Part series conveys results of surveys.

How can Greencastle capitalize on the westward growth of the Indianapolis metropolitan area, and at the same time, distinguish itself from other west side communities? How can Greencastle improve its image? Stabilize its economic foundations? Build a better sense of community? And how can Greencastle make the short list of places people consider as they make decisions about where they want to live and raise their families?

These are a few of the questions that led the Hometown Greencastle Alliance, a working group comprised of local business leaders and community stakeholders, to initiate the Greencastle community development and marketing initiative announced in March. The Alliance appealed to the community and has raised \$55,000 in non-taxpayer funds from the private sector. Phase I of the project has been funded by the Citizens Action Committee for Industrial Development (CACFID) through the investment of economic development funds, Phase II and III are fully funded through the generosity of the community partners: a 3-year pledge by NSSB of \$10000, a 3-year pledge from ONB of \$5000; a 3-year pledge from First National Bank of \$1500; Duke Energy and DePauw University each committing \$5000; United Way, Putnam County/Greencastle Development Center and the Greater Greencastle Chamber of Commerce \$2500 each; and several smaller donations. Fund raising efforts continue for implementation of Phase IV to take action on the anticipated community development and marketing plan.

In expressing gratitude to the partners, Ken Eitel, facilitator of the Alliance observed, "This is an effort started by a group of citizens with community and business leadership responsibilities who, like many residents of Greencastle, appreciate the assets of our city, the benefits their families enjoy and a desire for others to see a future in a thriving community."

After an extensive search and interview process by the Marketing Taskforce, the Alliance retained the Indianapolis firm F2/Inc., John Goss, and Strategic Marketing and Research, Inc. to conduct analyses,

Greencastle Hometown Alliance

Gary Barcus

Main Street Greencastle

Amy Doan

United Way of Putnam County

Greg Bennington

Greater Greencastle Chamber of Commerce

Bob Hutchings

CACFID

Mayor Nancy Michael

City of Greencastle

Dr. Robert Green

Greencastle Community Schools

Dennis Weatherford

Putnam County Hospital

Sue Murray

Putnam County Community Foundation

Neal Abraham

DePauw University

Rick Burger

Duke Energy Indiana

Dave Murray

Murray & Associates

Tim Geirke

Greencastle/ Putnam County
Development Center

Dick Speller

DePauw University

Ken Eitel

Eitel's Flowers & Gifts

make recommendations, and craft a marketing and community development plan to be completed by September 1, 2006. John and his associate, Lynne Fuller, in cooperation with the Alliance; Tammy Amor, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce; Ken Owen, DePauw Media Relations; and Bill Dory, Director of the Greencastle/Putnam County Development Center; have all spent hours in the community, developing the internal and external survey, and assessing results. Phase I of the 3 phase developmental process has been completed. Phase II involves citizen participation.

This is the first in a series of five stories that will appear daily this week through Saturday to share the research findings and early conclusions from Phase I with the greater Greencastle community. The series can also be accessed on line at www.bannergraphic.com. Second, 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 view the series on the Greencastle website www.gogreencastle.com and send comments via e-mail to Greencastle Chamber of Commerce at gchamber@ccrtc.com.

Phase I, the discovery phase of the three-phase plan, was an extensive opinion and data gathering process and the resulting findings are beginning to provide some answers. For the first time, the community has the benefit of established research on which to base decisions and which will provide a yardstick for measuring progress over time.

To date, nearly 650 Greencastle residents have shared their views about the community by completing a local survey, and an additional 600 residents of Central Indiana who live outside of Putnam County were queried about their awareness and perceptions of Greencastle. Consultants also conducted a communications audit, an asset analysis of competing communities, and studied state and national statistics relative to population growth and commuting trends, the housing market, job and business growth, and economic development, community development, and downtown development trends. Comparative assessments have been made between Greencastle and Noblesville, Plainfield, Franklin, Brownsburg, Crawfordsville, Avon, Danville, Bloomington, Zionsville, and Greenfield.

According to U.S. Census data, the cost of housing in Greencastle and Crawfordsville is the lowest among the communities studied, a core issue for people making decisions about communities in which they would consider living. Along with Franklin, Greencastle is considered the safest place to live, and receives the lowest and best ratings for both violent and property crime by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report. And according to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Quality Index, Greencastle leads the communities studied in terms of the environment, with the highest air and water quality ratings.

Overall, while most Indiana communities share lower-than-national-average costs of living, Greencastle indexes at 81.9 against the national average of 100, making it the least expensive place to live in Central Indiana next to Crawfordsville, which indexes at 79.1. However, lower costs of living generally equate to lower household incomes; indeed, while Putnam County's median household income grew by 50 percent between 1990 and 2000, it remains the lowest among the competitive communities at \$30,248. This compares with the Indiana average of \$43,323.

The opinion studies indicated that Central Indiana residents also believe Greencastle to be an economical place to live as well as clean and safe – clear indicators that, at least in terms of these attributes, the perception matches the reality. This is important as Greencastle considers potential marketing messages and positioning strategies to improve amenities, products and services, employment opportunities, housing, and increase household incomes.

Further, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the last five years, Greencastle's population has grown at a slower rate (4.1 percent) than other communities studied, with the exception of Crawfordsville, which experienced a negative one percent change. Not surprisingly, Avon grew at a dramatic rate of nearly 41 percent, which has likely been the indicator that triggered national brand retailers to proliferate in that area. However, the Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC) at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business projects Putnam County will grow by up to 3,000 residents by 2010. By 2040, Putnam County joins 15 other Indiana counties, mostly in the central and southeast areas of the state, projected to grow at a rate that is greater than what is considered to be a natural increase, placing Putnam County squarely within what will be considered the greater Indianapolis metropolitan area. These growth trends confirm the greater Greencastle region's need to examine and take control of its future.

In addition, generational shifts are and will impact Greencastle just as they are impacting Indiana and the entire nation. These demographic realities will add new pressures on the health care industry. Older age groups and retirees will influence the housing market with increased demand for larger but lower-maintenance residences, more and better restaurants, retail establishments, recreation and leisure opportunities. If Greencastle is to meet the requirements of an aging population, it will need to consider the needs and employment requirements of an older workforce in the amenity package that is available to all residents. Greencastle's economy and amenities will need to change with workplace, consumer, and residential trends.

One observation is an important trend identified by the IBRC: small businesses, defined as one to 49 employees, generally with a higher wage scale, are leading job growth in Midwestern and Great Lakes states. Putnam County sees more than 40 percent of resident wages earned from large business, distribution, and manufacturing, as do many other counties in Indiana. This trend indicates a need for the community to cultivate small to medium firms.

Mayor Nancy Michael offered in support of the effort. "The Alliance members are excited about the implications and opportunities this project will have for the neighborhoods, jobs, and shopping Greencastle will offer its citizens in the future," said Mayor Michael. "This series of articles in cooperation with the *Banner Graphic* is the first step in informing our citizens of the work of the Hometown Alliance."

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing Greencastle identified by the survey is one of awareness and familiarity with the community's attributes: its unique sense of place, its accessibility, its recreational amenities, and the benefits of a college or university town. These issues will be explored in the second article in this series, which will appear in tomorrow's newspaper.

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