

Springfield OH
All-America City Award Application
Executive Summary

The City of Springfield is itself the very definition of a true American Heartland community. It is a city in constant change and truly does live up to its name. Much like the numerous springs that characterize the area and gave the city its name, Springfield has sprung forth out of the difficult times to become a thriving and life-filled community. It is abounding with energy—a fountain of hope in the heart of America.

Springfield has its problems, just like every other American community. However, the people of Springfield are not easily downtrodden by obstacles and challenges. Rather, citizens are invigorated by such hard times, and become all the more determined to come out for the better. In 1983, Newsweek Magazine selected Springfield to be the focus of its 50th Anniversary issue, calling it the “typical” American city, a place where one will find “that stubborn American grit in adversity.” Springfield certainly continues to define what American cities are all about—hard work, community pride, and unity of spirit. Springfield truly is a spring of life.

Springfield can celebrate its vast history, culture and diversity. Springfield has a history. Historic districts dominate much of the city, emphasizing Springfield’s incredibly rich and colorful heritage. Springfield has culture. The Springfield Museum of Art offers a permanent collection of American and French art along with exhibitions from local and international artists. The Springfield Symphony Orchestra and the Springfield Civic Theater are regulars at the Clark State Performing Arts Center. The Summer Arts Festival runs throughout the summer and features rounds of art exhibits and musical performances.

However, Springfield is not without real challenges. Harsh economic conditions have effected Springfield in a number of ways. During the second half of the 20th century, significant job losses in Springfield resulted in many challenges—one of which is substandard housing. Hard economic times led to residential disinvestment. Today, citizens work alongside community leaders to foster reinvestment. As our community works to rebuild, we reinvigorate our pride!

The Rocking Horse area has been dramatically effected. The 2000 census indicated that housing values in this area had bottomed out at just over \$50,000 per unit. The houses are old and tired; on average 80% of the homes located in this area were built before 1959. Most have seen several owners occupy their rooms and have been relegated into the hands of property owners renting them out to tenants (57.3%) that have little interest in the homes’ historic charm. Others, 16.4%, are vacant and suffering from a lack of attention. A recent housing study indicated that 82% of the city’s substandard or boarded houses are within this one concentrated area.

Approximately two years old, Neighborhood Housing Partnership (NHP) of Greater Springfield, Inc. was created to strengthen neighborhoods primarily by increasing homeownership opportunities and sustaining those investments by providing affordable home repair programs. NHP understands that homeowners may need help with repairs and improvements and that well maintained homes are vital for healthy neighborhoods. As such, NHP offers low-interest loan and incentive programs to assist homeowners with improvements. A special product developed for the target area is a matching dollar for dollar incentive for exterior improvements. Over 100 properties have been improved in two years.

NHP also offers comprehensive homebuyer education and credit counseling to help prospective homebuyers learn about the home buying process and avoid many of the common pitfalls. NHP currently has a ratio of approximately one homebuyer for every three receiving counseling services.

NHP has a broad-based level of support for its community development efforts. These programs are sustained through win-win partnerships with government, private foundations, lenders, Board of Realtors, and corporate support. Lenders benefit from a growing market of homebuyers, and invest with confidence that NHP borrowers will pay back their loans on time and in full. Realtors and insurance companies are provided with a new source of clients. Home repair and improvement businesses have a reliable source for ongoing business. Government Agencies save time and resources, as NHP administers community development programs and services.

A second challenge confronting the Springfield community is one not uncommon in many Midwest communities. Springfield has experienced a recent surge of immigrants, many originating from Central and South America and Eastern Europe. Often they arrive in the area with extremely limited knowledge of English and little understanding of basic local culture. In addition, educational attainment for Springfield area residents is significantly lower than the state and national averages, despite the readily accessible universities and community colleges in a rather small radius.

It is estimated that over 20,000 adults in Springfield and Clark County have trouble reading text as simple as a road sign or a food label. This staggering statistic results in higher dependency on welfare, which hurts the community economically through loss of professional labor capital. Another major problem resulting from adult illiteracy is the affect that it has on children. Children whose parents cannot read are much more likely to lack the desire to achieve higher levels of education. This could have disastrous effects on the future economy and progress of Springfield.

Illiteracy is an obvious problem with potentially dangerous ramifications if left unaddressed. Approximately 20% of the area's adults need help improving their

literacy skills. The Clark County Literacy Coalition was initially established to provide adult literacy education through one-on-one tutoring. Their vision is for every adult in Clark County to be functionally literate and the Coalition was founded on this principle.

For several years after it was founded, the Coalition continued to simply provide volunteer tutoring services for desirous adults. However, in recent years, the Clark County Literacy Coalition has had an even greater impact than previously in the Springfield area. New programs have been developed to address new needs of the community. One such need, added in 2001, was ESOL classes which help promote literacy in the growing minority and immigrant population in Springfield. ESOL provides opportunities for those new to the U.S., or those who are not fluent in English to gain understanding of the language and culture of our country. They are involved in conversation classes where they learn basic life skills and learn about living in the American culture.

The Family Teaching and Learning Center (Family TLC) has also only been operating for a few years. This service is available at the Warder Literacy Center for parents with children enrolled in a CCLC program. One night a week, parents spend time working on life and parenting skills, as well as literacy, while their children get help with their homework, reading or other enjoyable educational activities.

Other programs include PICK-A-Pack (Parents Increasing Children's Knowledge), GED preparation and Adult Basic Literacy Education. Computer training is another recent addition to the Coalition. Each aspect of the Coalition is evaluated regularly to ensure that every program is addressing current community needs.

Finally, Springfield faces the challenge of keeping her children healthy, happy, and strong. The 2000 census indicates nearly 40% of the persons living in poverty in Springfield are children. Thirteen-percent of those children are under five years of age. Given these stark statistics, the Springfield Community has banded together to insure that every family in Springfield can receive state of the art health treatment—regardless of ones ability to pay.

During a rally held on the Springfield City Plaza, Mayor Warren Copeland and Dr. James Duffee, a local pediatrician, addressed concerns about childhood poverty. Dr. Duffee presented the dream of a pediatric clinic that would serve children regardless of income. In 1999, the Rocking Horse Center was developed in a collaboration of its founding physician, representatives of the city's two hospitals, city leaders, churches, and community agencies.

RHC bases its practice on anticipatory guidance. By educating parents on the importance of immunizations, regular check-ups, and nutrition, RHC takes advantage of opportunities to prevent childhood health problems.

Far from being a run of the mill medical clinic, RHC forfeits its profit potential in order to provide state-of-the-art health care to Springfield's children. The 2004 annual budget projects that the center will see a \$1.3 million expenditure over revenue deficit. Community members come together to raise funds on an annual basis in an effort to insure that the center will remain open year after year.

Since January 2004, the Rocking Horse Center doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, and practitioners have logged over 18,000 visits. Of these visits, 5,500 children have been served. Childhood poverty and under-insured families are tough challenges for the citizens of Springfield; however, we are not deterred. Each year the center gets stronger and serves more families. We refuse to give up on our children's health—mental, physical, and emotional. Healthier children build healthy communities—this is what Springfield, as a community believes!

The City of Springfield is in a continual state of change, constantly flowing with excited anticipation for the future of the community. The city has the desire and the ability to reach its goals for future development through continued cooperative efforts and united ambitions.

Several years ago the city and county united to adopt the Crossroads Comprehensive Land Use Plan to strategize and develop a general framework for decisions concerning land and development for the future. Since its implementation, a myriad of community developments have taken place and will continue to occur in the future.

Springfield has a vision for becoming the premier city in which to live and work by:

- Retaining and attracting business and employment opportunities to the Springfield Area
- Providing safe and secure neighborhoods in which to live and raise families
- Fostering civic pride and community involvement
- Continually beautifying and improving the appearance of our city and its neighborhoods;
- Working cooperatively with neighboring communities and townships on regional initiatives
- Working jointly with our community schools and educational institutions at increasing opportunities for the development of our youth and our citizens.

We can achieve these goals. Not through stagnant dependence on status quo policies, but rather through active involvement from every community sector to join forces and make Springfield an amazing place to live, work, and play!