

Envision 2020 Monthly Update April 2003

Lynn Beshear, Executive Director

On April 2, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, US Army, said in his early morning briefing, "Tasks of coalition forces take place over time, and we adjust them in scale and scope as the situation dictates." That was the day Jessica Lynch was rescued. That statement describes Envision 2020 perfectly.

We have a choice here in Central Alabama; we can adjust our work in scale and scope like the military coalition forces, or we can always be looking to reach our potential, but never getting there. Marketing professionals say it takes 15 years to change an image. We are either getting better or getting worse, but we cannot stand still and move forward simultaneously.

Envision's Financing Public Services Task Force is conducting Crucial Community Conversations on public education, and everyone will be well served by participating. Whether or not families have, or ever will have, children in the public schools irrelevant; every person is affected every day by graduates of public schools – they are the workforce.

Task Force research revealed a troubling statistic: the cost of housing and educating one child in a facility like Mt Meigs is \$132 per day – that is \$48,180 per year per child of our tax dollars. Further research revealed Harvard University's tuition, room, board and mandatory fees for an incoming freshman this fall will be \$38,000. In other words, every child in Alabama's juvenile detention system, could theoretically attend Harvard University and have \$10,000 left over for books and expenses!

In the visioning phase, the people's top priority was stable and equitable funding for K-12 education. An April 21 headline in the *Montgomery Advertiser* said many of Alabama's new teachers would not be able to get jobs here due to the funding crisis. Georgia and Florida are recruiting heavily, and yet another group of college graduates are leaving for more opportunity in a state committed to education.

Central Alabama is poised at a major crossroads. But we must capitalize on this rare growth opportunity now!

Recently, Todd Strange shared his aspiration for this region is to no longer have to talk about its *potential* for greatness, but rather to actually achieve greatness. I agree with Todd and I believe we can.

Health Task Force Update

It is no secret our country has reached a crisis in health and healthcare delivery. And national problems are compounded here by our region's two major hospitals' financial difficulties. Not to mention physicians who cannot get liability insurance.

Individual and family health insurance is increasing in cost, with family incomes even in the \$70,000 range, no longer able to provide health insurance. This situation forces people to seek the most expensive care: showing up at the emergency room, which because patients are unable to pay, forces hospitals deeper into the red.

Diabetes has become epidemic, especially in children, who as we experience urban sprawl, are more and more dependent on automobiles for transportation to

activities, rather than walking or riding bicycles. Latchkey children depend on fast food or microwavable meals that are often high in fat and salt.

And there is more grim news: as the population ages, there will be an increasing need for health professionals of all types. Currently the average age for local physicians is in the mid-40s, and recruitment for younger ones is a challenge. Despite our high quality of life in many areas, Alabama's reputation with regard to K-12 education, in particular, is not attractive to highly educated individuals from other parts of the country.

Another major problem area is in nursing. A master's level instructor is required for every 8 nursing students, and the youngest member of Auburn and AUM's nursing faculty is 42, with no one coming along to take their place. By 2010 we will need one million new nurses in the United States, and under current nursing education conditions, the need will not be met. One in four nurses trained in this region moves to other cities offering more money than they can earn in Alabama.

But there are some glimmers of hope. There are 16 organizations in the state working on all aspects of physician training and recruitment, including scholarships for rural students to move back home after medical training, visa waivers for international physicians, physician opportunity fairs and medical school scholarship awards. Auburn and AUM are developing a master's in nursing program that will be shared with both campuses. Also, if there is any good news in a depressed economy, it is people tend to go into nursing during these times, due to job security.

The other good news is Alabama's Health Officer, Dr. Don Williamson, is heading the Envision 2020 Health Task Force, which is largely comprised of healthcare and healthcare related professionals. The task force is working on models for access and coordination to care and prevention and wellness that hopefully can be adapted for statewide use. The Medical Alliance of physician spouses is working on this task force to focus in the area of physician recruitment.

In Envision 2020's October 2002 public report meeting, Dr. Williamson stated implementation of the Envision plan is vital to creating desirable communities that will be attractive to health professionals. In light of the situation, that statement is even truer now!

Upcoming Events:

Financing Public Service's Crucial Community Conversations dates and locations:

Each meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m.

Carver High	Tuesday, April 29
Chisholm Elementary	Thursday, May 1
Jeff Davis High	Tuesday, May 6
McKee Jr. High	Thursday, May 8
Montgomery County High	Tuesday, May 13
Southlawn Middle School	Thursday, May 15
Garrett Elementary	Thursday, May 22

Other locations in all Envision counties TBA

For more information, call Caroline Montgomery at the Montgomery Education Foundation at 264-6223.

How to get involved

1. Go to the Website at envision2020.org
2. Call 269-0224 to sign up for a task force or arrange for a speaker.
3. Use the Envision Plan to guide activities and planning in all organizations.
4. Participate in a Crucial Community Conversation
5. Get information on Envision at additional locations: RiverRegionLive.com and SearchMontgomery.com