



Hello Hamilton County

June/July 2011

E-News for Hamilton County citizens and employees

Quote of the month:

***“Without continual growth and progress,
such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.”***

~Benjamin Franklin

Revitalizing Hamilton County's Neighborhoods with a Land Bank

Hamilton County has been deeply impacted by the national foreclosure crisis. Since 2007, neighborhoods have been reeling from the effects of over 29,000 foreclosure filings in our County.

Residential and commercial foreclosures broadly impact our community by dragging down property values, increasing insurance costs to adjacent property owners, decreasing government revenue collection and fostering crime.

To combat the devastating effects of foreclosures in our County, the Board of Commissioners unanimously agreed to begin the process of creating a Land Bank to deal with the problem of blighted and unproductive properties in neighborhoods across the County.

“There are thousands of properties across Hamilton County discouraging homeowner and business investment in many of our neighborhoods,” said Commissioner Greg Hartmann. “The Land Bank can turn these properties into homes and businesses that will create jobs and generate revenue that will have a direct impact on our local economy.”

The Land Bank can acquire vacant and abandoned properties - through tax foreclosures, from lenders and banks, or on the open market - and



Senator Richard Finan, Chair of the Hamilton County Planning Partnership, spoke about the Land Bank during a June 9th information session.

then clear the titles and liens and redistribute them for productive use. A Land Bank in Hamilton County will be able to engage in negotiations and contracts for purchase and development, and operate strategically with buyers and developers as part of an overall property redevelopment plan for commercial and residential properties.

The Land Bank will be funded primarily through delinquent property tax revenue, which is collected by the County throughout the year. When delinquent tax revenue is received by the County,

state law now allows counties to reserve 5% of collected revenue prior to redistribution of these funds back to applicable taxing jurisdictions in the County's Delinquent Tax & Assessment Collection (DTAC) fund. In the context of budgets in the tens of millions for many jurisdictions, the small amount of funds withheld from tax jurisdictions, including townships, cities, villages, school districts, County property tax levies and tax increment financing districts, will be the catalyst to fund and begin the Land Bank.

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For example, across all 49 townships, cities and villages in the County, a total of just \$379,000 will be withheld to begin the Land Bank.

Most important, while jurisdictions temporarily lose a small level of delinquent tax revenue to fund the Land Bank, the resulting property tax revenue and economic activity generated will pay dividends. Each property that the Land Bank improves and restores to residential or commercial use will provide taxing jurisdictions, like schools and municipalities, new, annual tax revenue streams which would not have otherwise existed. The

County has heard positive feedback and support for a Land Bank from several jurisdictions that will benefit from the increased property values and restored neighborhoods.

On Thursday, June 9th the Hamilton County Planning Partnership hosted an information session in Springfield Township to gather feedback from residents and to answer questions about the Land Bank process. You can see the power point presentation and other information about the Land Bank on the County Web site:

<http://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/hc/landBanking.asp>

A Message from County Administrator Christian Sigman



In my first contribution to *Hello Hamilton County* as your County Administrator, I want to say "THANK YOU" to our workforce and the offices of the independently elected county officials. Thank you for all your hard work every day and for maintaining our reputation as a well managed urban county.

As public servants we have the opportunity every day to make a difference in somebody's life, to advance policy initiatives, and to present the County to the world. The biggest impact for our residents, businesses and visitors is from the hundreds of things each of the County's 4,800 employees do each day.

Some of these efforts result in formal recognition from programs like *Project Gain*, *Fresh Ideas* and the annual Employee of the Year Program. Many efforts are noted in annual performance reviews. But I suspect a vast majority of our individual efforts go without formal recognition. We merely chalk them up to being part of another satisfying day at work. Whether they're formally recognized or not, all of your efforts contribute to making Hamilton County stronger, and your work is appreciated.

We in County Administration focus much of our efforts on the budget during the summertime. Summer is upon us, and we face another challenging budget for 2012. These past few years the County has seen tough economic times and we have addressed the prolonged recession head on, but we still have important work ahead. Economic development remains a top priority, our infrastructure must be maintained, the need for workforce development continues, as well as needs for many other important initiatives. The key policy priorities of the County Commission are available on the County's main webpage. You're welcome to view the priorities to see how we are addressing these important issues. I humbly ask for your continued efforts, support, and guidance as we move forward.

I believe that the County Administrator must be accessible, and I want to hear from you. Please send me an email with your suggestions, questions or comments. You may also contact me via the County website at:

http://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/hc/ask_administrator.asp

All the best,

Christian Sigman,
County Administrator



Celebration of Dreams Honors Foster Youth Upon High School Graduation



On Wednesday, June 15th, Hamilton County Job and Family Services and the Foster Child Enrichment Council held a banquet for the foster youth who have persevered to obtain a high school diploma or a GED. At the 12th annual dinner, magistrates, judges, caseworkers, and Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI) Mentors all helped celebrate the 37 teens who graduated.

While graduating high school is always a momentous occasion, that achievement is amplified for the foster children who were forced to overcome extraordinary obstacles. Educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care are dismal. The overall graduation rate for high school is 70% nationwide, the graduation rate for foster children drops to 50%. This celebration is well deserved!

The banquet not only celebrates the graduates, but the people who have made a difference in their lives. University of Cincinnati President Gregory Williams was the keynote speaker.



Pictured Left: Commissioner Chris Monzel, JFS Director Moira Weir, County Administrator Christian Sigman, and University of Cincinnati President Gregory Williams say the pledge of allegiance during the Celebration of Dreams. Pictured center: A graduate collects her gifts. Gifts of much needed items are donated and provided to the Foster Youth to help them begin the next phase of their lives. Pictured right: Judge Thomas Lipps, retired from Hamilton County Juvenile Court, visits with other Celebration of Dreams attendees.



Judge James Cissell Honored For Historical Records Preservation Efforts



Jim Dempsey, Hamilton County Genealogical Society, presented Judge James Cissell with a certificate honoring his efforts to preserve and provide access to historical records.

On April 16, 2011 Judge James Cissell was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the Hamilton County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society for his efforts related to historical records preservation and access.

As Clerk of Courts, he set a vision of making all their documents available online, the first in the state of Ohio. By 1999, the first goal was reached with 1.5 million documents available on their website. By 2001, it was up to nearly 4 million documents. This was such an accomplishment that in 1999, out of hundreds of nominees from 22 countries, the Hamilton County Clerk of Court's website was awarded the ComputerWorld Smithsonian Medallion Award for "innovative application of technology that produce positive social, economic and educational change."

In 2003, Judge Cissell carried his vision to the Probate Court office. His next vision was to preserve 1,600 books and over 1 million pages by converting the paper and microfilm to digital images. At that time, only documents created after 1983 were available online. In December 2009, after a six year conversion effort, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported, "more than 1 million documents – some dating to 1791 – are now available online from the

Probate Court that will be a boon to genealogy buffs and history researchers."

"There are many, many folks who wish to trace their genealogy," said Judge Cissell. "By doing this, people will not have to come to our office in Cincinnati."

As incredible as these efforts were, he is not done. With millions of documents to go, what should be done first? In January, the Judge invited Jim Dempsey of the Hamilton County Genealogical Society to work with his staff to help prioritize their efforts. In March, Judge Cissell approved Mr. Dempsey's proposal for a joint effort between the Hamilton County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society and his staff to digitize thousands of inventory and account records that survived the 1884 court house fire. Chapter volunteers will transcribe indexes for these records to put on their website. If Hamilton County's Probate record access is not already the best in the nation, it soon will be.

So, for his foresight, the monumental effort, and for the revolutionary access to Hamilton County historical and genealogical records, the Ohio Genealogical Society awarded Judge James Cissell with their Chapter's Certificate of Appreciation.



Fighting Senior Fraud in Hamilton County through the Hamilton County Coalition to Stop Fraud, Scams & Abuse



Commissioner Greg Hartmann speaks to seniors at the Mayerson Jewish Community Center about the dangers of fraud and scams.

Financial exploitation can happen to anyone, but scammers and criminals often target our community's most vulnerable populations. For senior citizens, these fraudulent ploys are especially effective – and unfortunately, according to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), seniors are 32% less likely to report fraud than those between 35 and 44 years old.

Quite often, for many financial crimes, such as telemarketing scams, home repair scams, insurance fraud and several others, seniors are the perfect target. Many times, seniors are home during the day, have a home telephone that they

answer often, and are more trusting than younger adults. They may also be lonely and isolated, confused about finances or too embarrassed to admit that they may be vulnerable to exploitation.

To combat this growing problem, the Hamilton County Coalition to Stop Fraud, Scams & Abuse focused their efforts on proactively educating seniors during the month of May.

Commissioner Greg Hartmann, along with Coalition partners Pro Seniors, Wesley Community Services, the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio and Better Business Bureau, teamed up to

visit several seniors centers across Hamilton County. Through presentations in Crosby Township, Lincoln Heights, the West End and Roselawn, the Coalition shared information with seniors to help them protect their personal information, recognize the signs of a scam and report their experiences to the proper authorities. The Coalition has plans to visit Sycamore Township, Springfield Township and North College Hill in the coming weeks.

For more information about protecting your loved ones from fraud and scams, visit the Coalition's Web site at www.hamilton-co.org/fraud.



Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services' YouTube Video Receives "Best in Class" NACo Achievement Award



A no-cost initiative by the Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services has earned an award for the department. The Hamilton County Department of Environmental Services' Recycling and Solid Waste District (District) has been honored with a 2011 National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award.

The District's YouTube video, "How to Dry out Your Latex Paint," has been named "Best in Class" in NACo's Civic Education and Public Information Achievement Award category.

The video was produced at no cost except for staff time, and it promoted a cost-saving change to the County's popular hazardous waste drop-off program. Previously, the hazardous waste drop-off program had accepted latex paint, and the paint was among the most dropped off materials. However, latex paint is not really a hazardous material. It can be safely disposed of, as long as it is dry when discarded. Declining to

accept latex paint at the hazardous waste drop-off sites achieved cost-savings for the District. While achieving the cost-savings was a great accomplishment, employees recognized that residents who used the drop-off program might be upset with the change. So the employees believed it was important to educate residents about how to dry the latex paint, so they could easily and safely dispose of it themselves. The YouTube video achieved that purpose!

The fact that the video did not cost the District any money and that over 1,250 residents have watched the over three-minute video about drying out latex paint is a testament to the innovative thinking and problem solving skills of the Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District staff.

To view the video, please visit the District's website at: <http://www.hamiltoncountyrecycles.org/index.php?page=latex-paint>



Hamilton County Job and Family Services 2010 Annual Report Available

In 2010, Hamilton County Job and Family Services (HCJFS) served one of every three residents through its Child Support program, one of every six in its public assistance programs and one of every 13 county children in its child welfare program.

In addition, two consecutive years of reductions resulted in a loss of more than 800 employees at the agency. Despite those reductions and greater demand than ever, HCJFS continues to do good work.

Some of that good work is detailed in Hamilton County Job and Family Services' recently released 2010 annual report. The report details some of the changes the agency implemented in 2010 along with some of the success stories.

For example, in 2010 Children's Services was selected to participate in a program developed with the American Humane Association, the Institute of Applied Research and a group of Minnesota consultants to explore alternative, individualized responses to child welfare cases. The idea is to keep children safely unified with families and out of foster care.

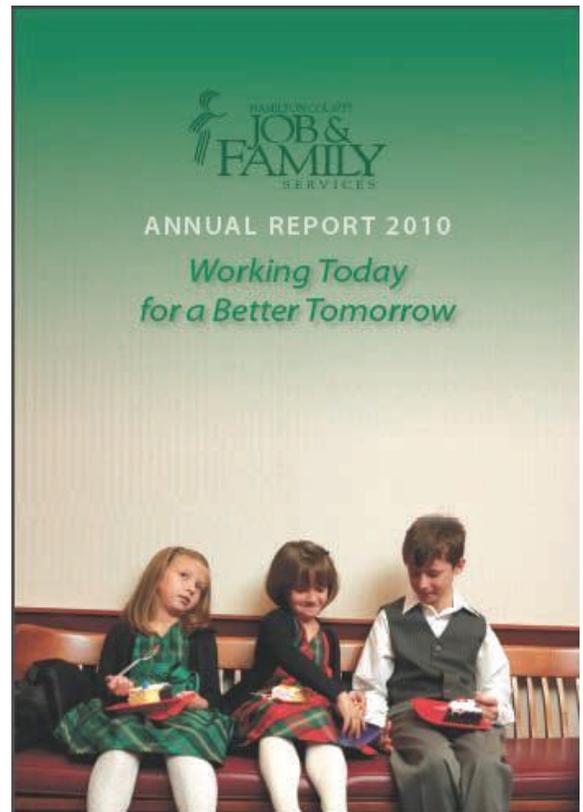
In Child Support, the agency hosted a statewide fatherhood conference, "A Brighter Future: Strengthening Fathers for Families and Community", which featured workshops on child

support, parenting, relationships, family violence and mental health. Former U.S. Congressman Steve Driehaus and Reds' Hall of Famer Joe Morgan both spoke at the event.

Client Services, which provides cash assistance, food assistance and Medicaid, also began new ways of doing business to help cope with record demand. The agency began taking re-applications over the phone, and has since moved to taking new applications online. The division also began using a work management tool to assess daily demand in its various departments and shift employees to the areas with the greatest need.

2010 was also a milestone year for Workforce Development. The economy brought more than 28,000 people through its various programs and the SuperJobs Center placed more than 2,000 in jobs.

Workforce Development also revamped its program in 2010 to ensure it met the 50 percent work-participation rate required by the federal government. In other words, at any given time, at least 50 percent of the Ohio



Works First recipients were participating in a volunteer, school or work activity. In November, Hamilton County became one of the first agencies in Ohio to meet the requirement.

Finally, in 2010 the state of Ohio consolidated and automated statewide payments in the Child Care program to providers from the Columbus office in a first step that will eventually lead to electronically tracking time and attendance.

To find out more about the changes the agency made in 2010 and to read about personal success stories, read the HCJFS 2010 annual report available [here](#).



You and the Legal System: When to Use Mediation

As a public service, the Hamilton County Law Library, in conjunction with the Cincinnati Bar Association's Lawyer Referral Service, will present:

You and the Legal System: When to Use Mediation

Friday, July 22, 2011

12:00 noon

Hamilton County Law Library

Hamilton County Courthouse

1000 Main St., sixth floor

Cincinnati, Ohio 45202



This program is free to the public and is designed for the non-lawyer citizen. It will last one hour with time for questions. Sherry L. Davis, Cincinnati area family law attorney & divorce mediator, will be the speaker. She will discuss mediation as a means of resolving disputes without a courtroom trial.

Please call 513.946.5300 at the Hamilton County Law Library to reserve a seat. Walk-ins will be accommodated as space permits. For directions to the Hamilton County Law Library, please visit this link: <http://www.hamilton-co.org/cinlawlib/about/findus.html>

Law Library Offers Skype and Web Conferencing Workstation

The Hamilton County Law Library has a computer available with a webcam, headset, and Skype account for use (by reservation only) by Hamilton County employees and law library subscribers. This workstation provides users a convenient location for conference calls and webinars requiring voice and video.

Although these applications can be free and simple to use, a potential user may need a microphone, headphones or speakers, a webcam, and installed applications. Skype and webinars may not have high-tech requirements but if you don't have the necessary components on your own computer, it can limit your participation.

For the very occasional user of video conferencing services, this proves a cost-effective approach, requiring no expense on the user's end. Some anticipated uses of this computer include participation in meetings, presentations, training, and interviews.

This is not a sophisticated arrangement, but it will allow for engagement and collaboration that might otherwise be limited to a telephone conference call. The Law Library also offers video conferencing services.

Please contact Law Library personnel at 513-946-5300 or reference@cms.hamilton-co.org for more information or to schedule a session.



Job and Family Services Achieves Reaccreditation Through Expedited Process

Just two weeks after a site visit from the Council on Accreditation (COA), Hamilton County Job and Family Services (HCJFS) has officially been reaccredited.

In fact, COA expedited HCJFS through the process because the agency scored so strongly and was found to be in compliance on all fundamental practice standards.

“COA is proud to recognize Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services as one of these outstanding providers, and we wish you the very best in your continuing work with the individuals you serve,” said Richard Klarberg, President and CEO of COA. “Because COA reviews and reaccredits the entire organization, not just specific programs, you can have confidence in the credibility, integrity and achievement of your entire organization.”

“This is important to the community we serve and our partners because it assures you we are conducting ourselves according to best-practice standards and providing quality service to our consumers,” said HCJFS Director Moira Weir. “This is a seal of approval that can give you confidence in this agency.”

HCJFS has been an accredited agency since 2001, and this will be the second reaccreditation. Beginning May 1, reviewers looked at the agency’s self-review, individual cases and interviewed staff.

Specifically, they looked at four areas: Child Protective Services, including intake and ongoing cases; Combined Foster Care and Kinship,

including any child placed in an out-of-home care setting; adoption; and Adult Protective Services.

During an exit interview in May, the reviewers did not have any negative remarks for the staff and were extremely complimentary about several of the programs.

“I think what I saw was a great deal of transparency. People seem to be aware of what’s going on and there is not a whole lot of secrets about the ramifications of the budget cuts,” COA Team Leader Herman Barber said.

Barber also said that he found there is good oversight of the agency; although the strategic plan had been delayed, it is now back on track. In addition, he said the oversight of finances is better than most agencies he has seen.

Barber also said it is evident that HCJFS is a customer-driven agency. Not only does HCJFS have the fastest Child Protective Services process he has seen so far, with multiple layers of information available to 241-KIDS hotline workers, but he also said the Alternative Response Program is excellent.

The COA team also said they were pleased to see:

- Managers do peer reviews
- Staff members have implemented their own morale-boosting programs such as the ‘Biggest Loser’ competition in the IS department



- Open communication with adoptive parents
- Availability of management reports to all staff through SACWIS
- Robust online information through the internal and external websites
- Easy access to training opportunities
- A safe environment
- Strong community partnerships

In addition, reviewers agreed that the agency has truly been able to do more with less and were impressed with how employees have handled the numerous cuts the agency endured.

“We are excited to be determined among the best of the best,” said Weir. “This is validation of the work we do and the effort we put into serving this community. We feed the hungry, protect the children and elderly, help the unemployed and underskilled find work, and make sure children have the resources they need to live happy, healthy lives. We are a rock for this community to lean on during hard times.”



Caring Families are Needed!



Destiny, Born June 1998

Cameron, Born January 2001

This extraverted big sister loves to be the center of attention while her introverted brother would rather watch and listen. Destiny and Cameron may seem like opposites but they have quite a bit in common. Both enjoy video games, rap music and their favorite TV channel: Disney.

Like most girls her age, Destiny likes to surround herself with friends and shops for the latest style of clothes and jewelry. This young teen is very engaging, and describes herself as social and chatty. Destiny desperately wants to belong in a family.

Cameron is academically on target and enjoys school. This reserved and quiet little boy longs for a dog to play with and would benefit from a calm and stable home. Both brother and sister need help coping with separation and would do well with parents to balance both of their needs.

To learn more about Destiny, Cameron and others available for adoption, please call 513-632-6366 or visit www.hckids.org.

Also, please follow Hamilton County JFS Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment on Facebook!

Find Great Items and Bargains On the Hamilton County Surplus Auction!



If you're in the market for a used fire truck, computer equipment, or legal books, you're in luck! You can find all of these items available for sale (at least through July 5th) on the Hamilton County Surplus Auction.

Items change frequently, so visit this link often to see what kind of items and bargains you can find:

www.hamiltoncountyohioauction.com



Caring Families are Needed!



Andwele
Born March 12, 1997

What teenage boy doesn't love the movie "Transformers?" Andwele is no exception – it's his favorite movie, and he would watch it over and over again, if no one else protested! He's a young man that is into adventure – whether it is through reading an exciting novel or testing his skills in the latest video game.

Basketball is Andwele's sport of choice, and he's quite good. He plays guard for his school team and doesn't mind spending hours working on his jump shot after school. This is a down-to-earth kid, however. He doesn't harbor dreams of someday joining the NBA. Instead he

wants to work hard at school so the he can become a doctor.

Andwele just wants a mother and father that he can call his own. His likeable personality and eager attitude make him a perfect fit for just about any family, but especially one who likes staying busy with a variety of different activities.

**To learn more about Andwele and others available for adoption,
please call 513-632-6366 or visit www.hcadopt.org.**



Please post "Hello Hamilton County," so everyone can see what's going on!

Hello Hamilton County is published monthly. It is designed to inform citizens and employees about news and events related to Hamilton County government. You can find current and archived editions on the County's website. If you have questions, suggestions, or article submissions, please contact Laura Maus.

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