



2008 All-America City Award Application

Application Deadline: Friday, February 29, 2008 (5 p.m. MST)

Finalists Announced: Friday, March 14, 2008

Competition and Awards Announced: June 4-6, 2008 in Tampa, Florida

All-America City Awards Criteria

- Cross-sector collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors and key constituencies;
- Inclusiveness demonstrated by recognition and involvement of diverse segments and perspectives (ethnic, racial, socio-economic, age, etc.) in community decision-making;
- Innovation demonstrated by creative solutions and leveraging of community resources;
- Significant and specific community achievements;
- Projects that address the community's most important needs and demonstrate results and impacts (for example, dollars raised or lives impacted); and
- Cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries.

Support of the All-America City Awards provided by:



Jones Day



The Official Airline of the All-America City Awards

Marriott International

Community Information

Community name and state:

Kissimmee, Osceola County

Your community is applying as a:

Neighborhood Town City County Region

If applying as a region, name participating communities:

Not Applicable

If applying as a neighborhood, name city:

Not Applicable

Has your community applied before? → Yes No If Yes, which years: 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2007

Has your community been a Finalist before? → Yes No If Yes, which years: 2007

Has your community been an All-America City before? Yes → No If Yes, which years: _____

Contact Information

All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout entire competition and for follow-up):

Name: Carla Banks

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E-mail Address: cbanks@kissimmee.org

List the 3 individuals who most actively participated in filling out this All-America City Award application (add additional lines if needed):

(Provide name and title; organization; phone; e-mail address)

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Mike Horner, President Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce, 407.847.3174,
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The community applying will receive one complimentary membership (or a membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?

Name Carla Banks

Address 101 N. Church Street

City, State, Zip Code Kissimmee, FL 34741

Phone Number 407.518.2314

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E-mail cbanks@kissimmee.org

If we are designated an All-America City, we agree to follow NCL's rules (available on the Web site) regarding use of the All-America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League.

Signature: _____ **Date:** February 15, 2008

Name: Carla Banks **Title:** Manager of Communications & Public Information

Community Statistics

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (*source suggestions:* U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics)

POPULATION (*in year 2000 or most recent*): 244,045

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 Population Estimates

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 1990-2000 (*indicate + or -*): +60.3 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau / 2006 Population Estimates

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN (*percentage*):

White alone	<u>84.4%</u>
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	<u>37.8%</u>
Black or African American alone	<u>10.1%</u>
Asian alone	<u>2.8%</u>
American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) alone	<u>.6%</u>
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOP) alone	<u>.2%</u>
Some other race alone	<u>*49.8%</u>
Two or more races	<u>1.9%</u>

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau/ 2006 Population Estimates; *(White persons who are not Hispanic)

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$ 38,954

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau/ 2006 Population Estimates

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: 13.1 %

Source/Date: U.S. Census Bureau/ 2003 Estimate

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 3.6 %

Source/Date: Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation- Local Area Unemployment Stats, January 2007

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (*percentages, if available*):

19 years old and under 22 %

20-24 15 %

25-44 29 %

45-64 23 %

65 and over 11 %

Source/Date: Osceola County Economic Development Department/ January 2007

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: 67.7 %

Source/Date: U.S Census Bureau/ 2006 Population Estimates

WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION -- Name the three largest employment sectors in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

Accommodation 17.7 %

Healthcare 15.8 %

Retail Trade 14.4 %

Source/Date: Osceola County Economic Development Department/ January 2007

★★ Please attach a state map with your community clearly marked (attach as a separate sheet).

Part I

Civic Infrastructure

Describe your community. Using the four major sections of the National Civic League's *The Civic Index, Second Edition* (see www.ncl.org for more information), examine your community's civic infrastructure and civic capacity and describe how your community *lives* each of the answers to each of the following questions. Please include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths and faced its challenges. The roman numerals correspond to parts of *The Civic Index, Second Edition*. Also see the application instructions for this section.

Add lines as needed for your responses

I. What is our community vision for its future? (300 word maximum) = 297

No issue has greater impact on our quality of life than growth management. Historically, our population has doubled each decade, since 1970. Currently at 244,045 residents, to move Kissimmee, Osceola County to the next level, it's vital to engage residents from every walk of life in establishing goals and strategies, and setting community direction.

In 1995, **Community Vision**, a grass-roots organization with few resources—generated a new era of civic awareness. Kissimmee, Osceola County and the School District contributed \$50,000 to accomplish what many thought impossible. Community Vision mustered hundreds of volunteers-- engaging 2,500 residents in discovering the common dreams our diverse community shared.

Through this process, community leaders prioritized our values and vision, accomplishing the following:

- **Environmental Protection-** established **Save And Value** our **Environment** referendum to acquire environmentally sensitive lands.
- **Economic Equity-** recognizing needs of the disadvantaged in the decision-making process
- **Quality Education-** continuous construction of schools
- **Managed Growth to Preserve Quality of Life-** participation in regional planning effort
- **Civic Pride-** continuation of Leadership and School of Government programs
- **Connectivity-** implementation of Neighborhood Block Party Express program

A new culture of collaboration resulted among non-profits and private/public sectors as the community took ownership of the vision jointly created. With phenomenal success over the past decade, Kissimmee, Osceola County engaged Community Vision to once again take the pulse of the community and create a new vision for a new day. Community Vision is facilitating a comprehensive and all-inclusive re-visioning effort. Given our population explosion and varied demographic make-up, it's important to reevaluate our strengths and challenges in light of the changes that have occurred over the past several years. The 2006 Visioning survey reached more residents than ever before because the survey was made available on Community Vision's Web site.

II. How are we fulfilling the new roles for community governance?

II. (a). What is the extent and nature of community member participation in community improvement efforts? (300 word maximum) = 300

1) Volunteers are recruited annually for the **Competitive Funding Process** to allocate government funds to non-profit and charitable organizations. In 2007, despite Kissimmee's funding being cut by \$3.7 million, these funds remained at the same level as 2006. Volunteers receive training, review agency documents, and visit non-profit agencies to learn about the services provided to residents. Volunteers meet from April-June to discuss their observations and formulate funding recommendations for the City and County Commissions. In 2007, nearly \$1 million was awarded to 33 social service and non-social service agencies, supporting 57 programs.

2) **Lakefront Redevelopment** – The goal is to enhance Kissimmee Lakefront Park, create new residential/retail opportunities, and establish an improved link between the lakefront and downtown. The planning process involved a series of workshops to allow citizens an opportunity to share their vision and wishlist. The workshops featured an interactive photo slide show and table-top exercises, facilitating public input on what types of amenities residents wanted included. Large maps were provided for citizens to pinpoint ideas. Consultants are currently in the design phase implementing the ideas shared by the citizens.

3) A positive partnership resulted in the area's first **Inter-Generational Campus** to address caring for **seniors and youth** in one location. **Council on Aging** concluded its capital campaign and construction began on its new facility. Meantime, the **Children's Advocacy Center (CAC)** began a capital campaign, but lacked a continuum of services. Elected officials and business leaders were inspired after visiting a state-of-the-art CAC, where children were interviewed in a child-friendly environment immediately following their ordeal. Give Kids Safe Shelter raised money, an architect voluntarily drafted blue prints, and the County guaranteed the \$2 million loan. Within 6-weeks issues with permits, parking, banking, and mission statement were resolved and both organizations, could finally envision the reality of this unique facility.

II. (b). What role does government play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum) = 264

It is easy to take for granted the number of mechanisms that have been established to heighten communication among Kissimmee, Osceola County's four governments.

1) **Monthly:** a lunch meeting allows city managers, the school superintendent, county manager, and the respective elected leaders to share information.

2) **Quarterly:** inter-governmental meetings are held to address shared challenges and find solutions to issues, such as school concurrency and consolidating services.

II. (b). What role does government play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (continued)

3) **Annually:** For the past 8 years Community Vision has organized daylong team-building retreats. During this retreat elected bodies can share their challenges and concentrate on building working relationships and discovering innovative solutions to demanding problems. More than 250 inter-local agreements have resulted, including the joint funding of an economic development expert to spur high wage job growth. Also, Toho Water Authority was formed to consolidate oversight of this valuable resource.

4) Another byproduct of the retreat was the partnership of OLE (**Osceola Legislative Effort**). The four local governments collectively contribute \$200,000 annually to fund OLE's state legislative lobbying efforts and determine the community's top five legislative priorities. The issues that make the list garner a unanimous vote and are presented to our legislators during a joint trip to the state capital. OLE accomplishments include acquiring more than \$100 million for Kissimmee/Osceola County and new school construction.

5) **Personally**, our elected leaders serve on numerous boards, including the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Community Vision, Chamber of Commerce, Council on Aging, Children's Advocacy Center, and a myriad more; contributing more than 100 hours in monthly service, while staying connected to issues affecting each segment of the community.

II. (c). What role does the non-profit sector play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum) = 287

1) Community Vision sponsors **Discover Osceola** to create a sense of belonging and help newcomers feel connected with the community. This is a free biennial event that was established in 1998 to provide residents and newcomers the opportunity to learn about Osceola County's rich heritage and environment.

The event also showcases a host of community assets, such as:

- Educational Opportunities
- Quality of Life Elements
- Government Services
- Civic Involvement Opportunities, etc.

The goal of this event is to provide residents with a one-stop-shop for information. More than 150 agencies, organizations and non-profits collaborate to create a festive atmosphere of interactive exhibits, activities and home-grown cuisine to make learning about our community a fun experience.

The following key community elements include:

- Health
- History
- Environment
- Jobs/Economy and
- Public Service

II. (c). What role does the non-profit sector play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (continued)

Elected officials are on hand to create awareness and answer questions. This family-friendly event offers residents the opportunity to explore key ingredients that make a community home. Generous corporate sponsors help to make the event possible and attendance has grown to 4,200, reflecting the community's diversity and hunger for information. Hundreds of newcomers signed up as volunteers.

2) Tracking the total number of volunteers and their hours is difficult for any community. In order to get an idea of the level of volunteerism, several organizations were asked to provide data about their volunteers.

The following figures represent a fraction of the volunteer hours accrued by local residents in 2007:

- **Community Vision:** 770 volunteers/7,680 hours
- **Osceola Education Foundation:** 383 volunteers/ hours
- **Osceola County Schools:** 12,000 volunteers/140,000 hours
- **Extension Services:** 3,044 volunteers/16,938 hours
- **Junior Achievement:** 2,900 volunteers/16,400 hours
- **Council on Aging – Retired Senior Volunteer Program:** 1974 volunteers/255,812 hours

II. (d). What role does business play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum) = 282

By consulting with experts, convening community leaders and organizing referendum campaigns, Kissimmee, Osceola County's business community plays an active role in community-wide decision-making.

The business community hosted an **Economic Development Summit**, which outlined a blueprint for the future of Kissimmee's economic development strategy.

Outcomes included:

- Creation of Economic Development Department jointly funded by Osceola County, the Osceola School District, Cities of Kissimmee and St. Cloud
- Targeted Industry Incentive Program
- Business Retention Program
- Osceola Small Business Development Center

As a result of the new strategy, Kissimmee, Osceola County went from five consecutive years of declining wages to being in the top five for fastest growing wages in the state for the last three years.

II. (d). What role does business play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (continued)

The business community initiated and led campaigns to pass **Local Referendums** including:

- Changing School Superintendent from an elected position to being appointed
- One percent sales tax to fund local infrastructure
- Election dates for the City of Kissimmee

The local Chamber of Commerce sponsors televised **Political Debates** for County Commission, City Commission, School Board, and State Legislature races.

Businesses are committed to improving our quality of life by sponsoring free **community events** and funding charitable organizations.

Events funded by the business sector include:

- **Festival of Rhythm & Blues**– sponsored by the Black Business Council, during Black History Month, attracting 5,000+ attendees annually.
- **Viva Osceola**– sponsored by the Hispanic Business Council, celebrates Latin culture and attracts 10,000+ attendees annually.

The City of Kissimmee has a very active non-profit community with dozens of groups working on numerous important issues. These organizations are governed largely by local business leaders volunteering their time. The majority of funding for these vital organizations comes from local business.

III. How do we work together as a community?

III. (a). How does our community recognize and celebrate its diversity? (300 word maximum) = 221

Our community embraces all ages, races and ethnic groups. We are committed to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all citizens and visitors.

We recognize and celebrate our diversity in the following ways:

- **Viva Osceola**- largest free Hispanic outdoor festival in Central Florida.
- **Festival of Rhythm & Blues**- free Black History Month celebration hosted by Black Business Council; spotlights African-American art, music, historians, and food.
- **Martin Luther King, Jr. Banquet**- annual awards recognition program sponsored by the Osceola Visionaries in honor of the slain civil rights leader.
- **Jazz Fest**- sponsored by Kissimmee Rotary Club; free jazz concert featuring local high school students and regional acts.

III. (a). How does our community recognize and celebrate its diversity? (continued)

- **Three Kings Day**- post Christmas Hispanic and European celebration of Christ's birth. This event is free and open to the community, features music, folklore and gifts distributed by Three Kings (elected officials in costume). The City, County, and Kissimmee Utility Authority make the event possible.
- **Caribbean Fusion**- free concert of Caribbean and Latino music and dances. Endorsed by Caribbean and Floridian Association and the Caribbean-American Peoples Association.
- **The Osceola County Fair**- promotes our ranching heritage and appeals to livestock owners and agriculturalists.
- **Hispanic School of Government**- free program offered by the City of Kissimmee and taught entirely in Spanish to inform citizens about the City's daily operations.

III. (b). How does our community work with neighboring communities to address shared challenges? Is there a shared regional vision? (300 word maximum) = 289

Our shared regional vision, entitled, "My Region," involves implementing regional concurrency standards designed to preserve the quality of life for all Central Floridians and ensure that positive growth in one municipality does not adversely impact another. This regional effort asks residents, "How shall we grow?" More than 9,000 people shared their opinions. The results can be found at www.myregion.org Issues like transportation, water resources, job creation, trade, etc. cross jurisdictional boundaries, so participation in a regional planning process for smart growth was a no-brainer for the City of Kissimmee.

Progress is being made through several collaborative efforts that have come about as a direct result of community awareness and relationship building. For example, Kissimmee/Osceola County was the first community to invest in the Central Florida Regional Growth Visioning Process. We hosted the first in a series of community meetings, involving seven neighboring counties. The visioning is a 15-month endeavor to engage citizens, community leaders and elected officials from throughout the Central Florida Region (Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and Volusia Counties) in intensive "community conversations" that will lead to a "shared vision" for Central Florida.

Sessions include the use of innovative scenario planning tools to provide citizens the opportunity to create an alternative vision for the future. Community-wide participation is crucial. Residents, church groups, businesses, community-based organizations, and civic groups are all participating.

Phase II of *myregion.org* officially came to a conclusion on Friday, December 14, 2007, as the Board of Directors unanimously approved the Organizational Structure and Operating Policies for Phase III.

III. (b). How does our community work with neighboring communities to address shared challenges? Is there a shared regional vision? (continued)

The final scenario framework will include recommendations to serve as guidelines for community leaders in their land and transportation plans, essentially creating a guide for what Central Florida can become. For more information visit www.myregion.org

IV. How does our community strengthen its ability to solve problems? (300 word maximum) = 295

The number and diversity of effective local leaders displaying a sound understanding of the challenges facing Kissimmee/Osceola County has grown tremendously as a result of the leadership and development programs sponsored by Community Vision. Citizens spend eight weeks exploring community issues, building relationships, and learning how to solve problems.

Leadership Osceola County (LOC) encourages participants to develop their natural leadership skills. LOC recruits civic-minded citizens who want to make a difference. Graduates of the program are encouraged to tackle pressing community issues. One class spear-headed the construction of a low-income housing project for senior citizens. Another class elected to preserve environmentally sensitive land. Due to their efforts, 70% of voters in 2004 approved the SAVE (Save And Value our Environment) referendum to acquire environmentally sensitive lands. For example, the Shingle Creek Preservation involved acquiring 182 environmentally-sensitive acres.

Leadership Legends teaches seniors (55+) about their community through hands-on activities, field trips, and guest speakers. This group raised funds to install special benches at the Center for the Arts in honor of artists and fellow Legends who passed away.

Teen Leadership Osceola provides incoming high school Juniors and Seniors from each local high school a forum to meet face-to-face with community leaders and learn about opportunities for involvement in the political and growth process of Kissimmee/Osceola County. Teens then become members of the Osceola Teen Alliance, a service club (similar to Rotary) that participates in service projects and fund raisers for youth initiatives. Annually, Teen Alliance members speak to lawmakers in the State Capital about youth issues.

Nearly 500 people of all ages and backgrounds have benefited from Community Vision's leadership development programs. Another effort worth noting is the **Education Foundation**, which has awarded graduating Osceola County high school students with more than \$1,800,000 in college scholarships.

Part II: Community Background and Community Challenge Section

Add lines as needed for your responses

1 (A). Community Background: Set the background for your community. Tell its story. Summarize your community's history, successes and struggles. Describe how your community got to where it is today and your community's current state of affairs. (700 word maximum) = 700

Kissimmee, Osceola County is the fourth fastest growing County in the U.S. In the past 30 years—the number of residents more than doubled two decades in a row. Since 2000, the population increased 60%. The diverse citizenship thrives mostly on a tourism-based economy. Our unemployment rate has been on a steady decline since 2002. The area's long-term investments in ranching and citrus remain very strong, while service industries flourish due to transportation opportunities and neighboring Orlando.

Pioneer settlers established themselves in the 1800s and found the Kissimmee River Valley was overrun with wild swamp cows. Thus the area's cattle trade was born. Florida's native "cracker cowboy" heritage emerged from this thriving industry. The ranchers used a braided leather whip that, when snapped in the air, made a loud "crack," hence the famous nickname.

In 1881, Philadelphia industrialist Hamilton Disston purchased four million acres for \$1 million. He drained two million acres of the land and dredged canals through the Kissimmee River from Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, Kissimmee became a center for shipbuilding and a major port for cattle ranchers and sugar cane growers.

In 1883, the area was incorporated as Kissimmee, the county seat of Osceola County, named for the Indian leader Osceola, whose name means "Singer of the Black Drink." Osceola County is approximately 1,506 square miles in area or, 965,760 acres. Kissimmee has bent with the times, but it has not broken. Facing Florida's continuous population growth and rising property values, many ranchers have sold their land and given up ranching.

In 1971, Kissimmee, Osceola County became an overnight vacation destination thanks to Disney World. Hotels, motels and restaurants blossomed. Extraordinary weather year-round helped the local tourism industry to thrive in the late-1990s, and remains strong today. Approximately seven million visitors make this their travel destination annually. In 2004 the Tourism Index increased 6%, while the 2005 index noted a 7% gain.

Since 1999, student enrollment has increased 68%. In 2005-2006 the district touted a graduation rate of 64.5% with approximately 53% of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. The State of Florida recognized 29 Osceola County schools as Golden School Award winners for having a total number of volunteer hours that equal twice the school's population. The district registered nearly 10,000 school volunteers in 2005-2006.

According to the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the population of Floridians ages 60+ is expected to increase more than 50% between 2000 and 2015. During the same time, Osceola County's population of residents ages 60+ is expected to grow nearly 99%. Moreover, the number of County residents in the 85+ categories will grow by 110% by 2015.

1 (A). Community Background: Set the background for your community. Tell its story. Summarize your community's history, successes and struggles. Describe how your community got to where it is today and your community's current state of affairs. (continued)

Approximately 5,800 seniors living alone run the risk of losing their independence if community-based services are not made available.

Planned for a ground breaking as early as 2011, the Bronson Development of Regional Impact (DRI) is a planned community. The Bronson community – with a mixture of condos, apartments, and single-family homes and age-restricted communities developed around centrally located parks and facilities, pathway systems and a neighborhood school – is projected to be built over five-years, spanning 568 acres.

Plans include buffers, berms and up to 40 acres of stormwater ponds to protect Shingle Creek and nearby pasture wetlands and cypress domes from the development. This will consist of a mixture of stores, possible offices, schools and parks with up to 465 single-family houses, 800 town homes, 170 condominiums, 360 apartments and 1,225 age-restricted residential units. Some single-family homes in the community will have front porches or front steps similar to the architectural styles of old Florida homes and side or scaled back garages to create a neighborhood atmosphere enjoyed in older neighborhoods.

The planned community not only offers a variety of residential lifestyles but a progression of living space opportunities. As homeowners age, their needs change. The community anticipates those changes, offering evolving residential properties for every age group, including a planned community for residents 55 and older living in single-family homes, town houses and condos planned for 242 acres at the south end of the property near the Boys & Girls Club. The community would include a 120,000-square-foot assisted-living facility and nursing home for up to 150 residents.

1 (B). Community Celebration: Why should your community be selected as an All-America City? Describe what makes your community a great place to live, work, and play. (300 word maximum) = 163

Kissimmee, Osceola County represents the best that life has to offer. Blessed with a rich heritage and bountiful landscape in the heart of Central Florida, we attract visitors and new residents from near and far. The community has gained a reputation for its year-round desirable climate and abundant recreational opportunities.

We have proven time and again to be a community that faces challenges head on and cares for the well-being of its citizens. Our community embraces all ages, races and ethnic groups. We are committed to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all citizens and visitors.

Kissimmee, Osceola County is ideally located at the doorstep of Walt Disney World®, Universal Studios®, Sea World®, Cypress Gardens®, Gatorland®, Silver Spurs Rodeo®, and many other popular attractions. Tourists can enjoy Kissimmee's historic downtown district, which features walking tours, antique shops, boutiques, and dining. The nightlife includes dinner shows and shopping outlets. There's also golf, tennis, bass fishing, water sports, eco-tourism and many other recreational activities.

1 (C). Community Challenges: Based upon your community's current status, describe your community's two most pressing challenges.

Challenge #1: *(200 words maximum) = 200*

Few community issues have received more attention than healthcare. From long-term to preventive care, our citizens have identified the desire to stay healthy as a primary concern. Questions are posed, such as are new hospitals being built? Are different areas of the region communicating with each other to make sure medical facilities are where they need to be? How do our medical assets stack up to those in other areas? How much medical research is being conducted locally and can our other industries support it? Are we taking full advantage of our resources?

Quality of care and access of care for uninsured and tourists, and dealing with unhealthy populations should be areas of focus. Nearly 30% of our community is either uninsured or underinsured—twice the national average. A dominance of low-wage jobs with no benefits prompted the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to designate Osceola County as a medically underserved community for low-income populations. The Florida Health Insurance Study, noted 44% of the County's uninsured adults postponed or went without medical care in the previous year because they couldn't afford treatment. Additionally, the high Hispanic population impacted healthcare delivery systems. Language barriers made cultural competency a priority.

Challenge #2: *(200 words maximum) = 170*

Kissimmee, Osceola County blends rural life with the amenities offered by neighboring the gateway to Disney World. It is the sixth largest Florida county (in acreage) with a population of more than 244,000 permanent residents. The county seat of Kissimmee is the largest municipality and the population has increased significantly at a breakneck pace, especially in our Hispanic community.

We have a highly mobile population— with some schools experiencing a 125% student turnover. Once known for its ranches, groves and undeveloped land, Osceola County is one of the fastest growing communities in the country. This rapid explosion of population growth has strained not only our physical infrastructure, but also our community resources available to the working poor.

Social service funds have been on the decline, but the needs for these services continues to rise as many families struggle to make low wages stretch. In order for our community to succeed, we must ensure that all citizens have a sense of belonging and resources to provide a better quality of life.

Part III: Community-Driven Projects

Add lines as needed for your responses

Part II requires descriptions of three collaborative community projects that have significantly affected the community.

The first two projects should be drawn directly from the two community challenges stated above.

The third project should be reflective of what your community is doing for children and youth.

PROJECT ONE (Challenge #1)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum) = 150

Mobile Medical Express

Community Vision's Health Issues collaborative is at the forefront of a myriad of Kissimmee, Osceola County betterment efforts. In September of 2004, Community Vision was selected to participate in a competitive, national process. The Community Vision Health Access Project (CV HAP) received a Federal HRSA grant to fund a **Mobile Medical Express** (MME).

This 205 square foot bus travels to under-served areas and provides primary and chronic healthcare to uninsured and underinsured patients... free-of-charge. The MME is equipped with a waiting area, nurse station, caseworker room, and an exam room. The Osceola Council on Aging is partnering with the CV HAP for clinical services. A Nurse Practitioner, Licensed Practical Nurse, Case Manager, Chronic Care Assistant Manager, and Driver operate the vehicle full time. Physicians volunteer and play a vital role in supporting the specialty care needs as well as the primary care needs of Kissimmee, Osceola County's uninsured and under-insured.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your first challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum) = 292

Community Vision's (CV) board is a governing body made of a community constituency (42). Relying on data, documented need and momentum, the board identifies a major issue yearly. A collaborative is then created based on this priority—relying on public/private partners to come to the table and contribute their perspective, resources, and talent (stone soup brew). Based on disturbing trends the CV board identified health-access as the challenge. A dominance of low-wage jobs with no benefits prompted the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to designate Osceola County as a medically underserved community for low-income populations. According to the Florida Health Insurance Study, 44% of the County's uninsured adults postponed or went without medical care in the previous 12 months because they were unable to afford treatment.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your first challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (continued)

The County desperately needed a program that would expand the quantity of medical facilities for its indigent residents, while decreasing the inappropriate use of Emergency Rooms. To that end, Community Vision and its partners developed an integrated primary care system to accommodate the needs of the growing uninsured population. Competitive grant funds were used to launch the Medical Mobile Express (MME), a “rolling doctor’s office,” which travels to nine underserved areas and provides much needed healthcare services. Through a network of providers, the MME has made notable improvements in the coordination of care available to the County’s underprivileged residents.

Community Vision’s health access program also focused attention on companion issues. Growth in the Hispanic population was impacting healthcare delivery systems. Language barriers made cultural competency a priority. Other funding streams were tapped with 500+ caseworkers enrolling in workshops focused on proper translation and cultural sensitivity. Most notably, in less than two years the Health Issues collaborative generated \$10 million to address this challenging problem.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum) = 299

Differing viewpoints are fostered in an environment of trust at Community Vision’s table. Annually, CV brings all elected bodies and staff leadership together for a day of team building, resulting in 250+ inter-local agreements. CV has successfully organized major Summits along with publishing a Community Report Card, which effectively uses scientific research and employs volunteer collective genius to determine direction, goals and plans. With success on other fronts, health access, with all its complexities and quagmires, proved to be most challenging.

CV participated in a Regional Health Assessment Partnership and hosted the community roll out Osceola-specific data. The results begged action—a taskforce of 12 established strategies. Securing a federal grant was a coup, but when the Mobile Medical Express began operation the expectation was the unit would primarily offer care to the underserved, dealing with common ailments and minor injuries. Instead, patients showed up with undiagnosed cancers, advanced heart disease and uncontrolled diabetes. In rural areas many hadn’t seen a doctor in more than 25 years. A continuum of care needed to be created from scratch. Complicating matters, Osceola had no medical society, community health centers, or volunteer physician network. A volunteer medical director assisted the taskforce in recruiting more than 57 specialists to accept referrals from the unit. Competing hospital CEOs partnered in offering 12 complete surgical admissions and biopsies in-kind. Another provider’s group offers blood tests and radiological services at cost or free. Collaboration was forged with a regional faith-based clinic offering pharmacy vouchers. The Health Issues Task Force has 170 partners.

As testament to the power of partnership—when third year federal funding of \$500,000 was cut, the community sustained the operations of the MME and the 3,200 who call it their medical home will continue to receive compassionate care regardless of their ability to pay.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum) = 293

Adults who meet the eligibility requirements (200% of the Federal Poverty Line) are provided free health services. The Mobile Medical Express (MME) served nearly 3,700 patients as of January 1, 2007. If it were not for the MME, many of these patients would pack emergency rooms for non-urgent conditions. The remainder would simply continue to go without medical attention.

The *2004 Central Florida Community Health Assessment* identified that nearly 30% of the Osceola County community is either uninsured or underinsured—twice the national average. The MME serves as the only healthcare option available for persons without adequate coverage.

The *Health Council of East Central Florida* notes that the age-adjusted death rate for Osceola County is among the highest in the state. The MME's team of seasoned practitioners utilizes advanced equipment to screen and monitor chronic conditions. Early diagnosis and intervention saves lives and ensures healthcare dollars are appropriately allocated.

A one-way bus trip to a healthcare facility can take two hours. Availability of healthcare in rural areas is virtually non-existent. The mobility limitations that once prevented many clients living in rural areas from receiving care have been all but eliminated. The care provided to patients visiting the MME does not focus exclusively on their physical health. Case managers aboard the unit provide referrals to patients, thereby linking patients with the health and human services available to meet their needs.

A majority of patients live paycheck-to-paycheck, weighing the importance of purchasing life-saving medications against buying food. With its extended evening hours, the MME is able to serve adult clients whose demanding work schedules make it difficult to seek medical care during regular business hours. The holistic approach of the Mobile Medical Express focuses on improving the overall health of every patient who comes aboard.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Beverly Hougland, Executive Director, Council on Aging, 407.846.8532, houglanb@osceola-coa.com

PROJECT TWO (Challenge #2)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum) = 141

Home for the Holidays

In order for our community to succeed, we must ensure that all citizens have a sense of belonging and resources to provide a better quality of life. **Home for the Holidays** is one answer to that objective.

Home for the Holidays creates a unique atmosphere where boxes packed with nutritionally balanced food were prepared with the intent to feed families for a full week. Most of the recipients expressed being equally as grateful for the food as they were for the toys. This was something organizers hadn't anticipated.

Parents could feel free to visit the toyshop, where they were assisted by a volunteer personal shopper to select gifts for their children. The event also featured a Social Service Expo and Job Fair. This was an opportunity to connect individuals with necessary resources such as child care, food stamps, medicaid, housing, etc.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your second challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum) = 278

Few communities face as many challenges as Kissimmee, Osceola County when it comes to the number of families who live paycheck to paycheck. For example, Poinciana is a community within Osceola County with a population of 60,000 people. It leads the nation in foreclosure rates. We also have the first designated school bus stops in a tourism corridor. More than 1,000 school children live in hotel rooms. No other tourist corridor in the country has been classified with this distinction.

It is in this eroding environment that a collaborative of community partners met to figure out how to assist those in need, during the holidays and beyond. It was determined that an event that began as a faith-based effort serving a couple hundred families needed to be ramped up.

For the past 10 years, we have reached out to our low-income families by treating them to a holiday event like none other. Despite their economic hardships, the **Home for the Holidays** event spreads a little joy to some of our most disadvantaged.

This project is able to be sustained thanks to the efforts made by each sector of the community:

- The venue was generously donated by Osceola County in the impressive amount of \$19,500 for the use of the Osceola Heritage Park.
- Additionally donations were raised throughout the community totaling more than \$125,000 and
- Approximately 22,000 toys were donated.
- Many local businesses gave of their time to support the effort by participating in the Job Fair, collecting stacks of completed job applications.
- Non-profit agencies promoted programs that offer a hand up and families needing case management received follow up calls in early January.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum) = 124

Community Vision managed the logistics of the overall event and recruited more than 700 volunteers to assist with parking, seating, gift organization, food distribution, toy sorting, etc.

The Home for the Holidays collaborative relies on the following community partnerships:

- Marine Corps' Toys for Tots- gathered and delivered toys.
- City of Kissimmee, Osceola County, and the City of St. Cloud- donated funding.
- Osceola County Emergency Services- provided food storage and distribution assistance.
- Local Law Enforcement Agencies- provided deputies and officers for security/crowd control.
- Social Service Agencies- shared client lists to reduce duplication and assure all families were served equally.
- Local Employers- participated in Job Fair.
- Non-profit agencies promoted programs and provided case management during the Social Service Expo.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum) = 300

No other effort embodies the compassion, collaboration and best use of resources in our community better than Home for the Holidays. What began as a faith-based effort that served a couple hundred families—grew into a massive undertaking serving more than 11,000 citizens, including 8,500 children in 2007 alone. An estimated 58% of our school kids receive free or reduced lunch and an alarming 80% of our residents are one paycheck away from being homeless. These statistics demonstrate the need associated with uplifting the working poor and providing them with comfort and joy during what can be a stressful time for everyone. Without hesitation the City and County governments, businesses, philanthropists, and non-profit groups join forces to make this event a reality by assuming non-traditional roles.

Increasingly, white collar workers as well as our working poor were finding themselves in desperate situations, lost in unknown waters having never needed social services before. Following the hustle and bustle associated with the holidays and once the ornaments were taken down and the gifts returned or exchanged...community stakeholders were motivated to focus on self-sufficiency on the back end of the Home for the Holidays event.

The concept of hosting an Empowerment Expo originated. This will be open to the public and designed to make participants feel comfortable as there will be no stigma attached. The organizations will coalesce this Spring, helping families take steps necessary to recover financially and holistically. This follow up program will introduce citizens to the resources available to them through various social service groups. Participants will have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with case workers who helped them during the Home for the Holidays event. They will formulate strategic plans geared specifically to their situations. The objective is to provide these individuals with real solutions to their pressing problems.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (*This person may be contacted to verify information.*)

Donna Sines, Executive Director, Community Vision, 407.933.0870, dsines@communityvision.org

PROJECT THREE

As a commitment to America's Promise, the National Civic League has issued the Youth Initiative Challenge. We ask that at least one project from each All-America City applicant document ways in which the lives of children and youth have been tangibly improved.

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum) = 150

Young Ladies of Excellence and Young Men of Distinction

The Young Ladies of Excellence and Young Men of Distinction programs were established for the purpose of addressing the needs of youth from one of Kissimmee, Osceola County's most disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. When the program first originated, participants were predominantly African-American. In recent years, the demographics cover a host of ethnic and racial groups.

These youngsters are reared in single-parent households, living in the housing projects located in a part of the community that was known for touting one of the highest crime rates. Several years ago staff from the community center became alarmed at the high degree of school dropouts, teen pregnancy cases and overall crime among the youth in this neighborhood.

In response, City of Kissimmee staff sought to create programming that specifically targeted the underlying causes to these issues. As a result, the Young Ladies of Excellence (YLE) and Young Men of Distinction (YMD) program was created.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and the challenge it is addressing, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum) = 300

The first challenge in getting this program off the ground involved formulating a curriculum that would address numerous concerns as they relate to youngsters growing up in low-income neighborhoods. The four main components of this program were identified after eliciting support from other groups within the community.

Each component was then structured, whereby the students are given 9-months to meet certain goals that are specific to the underlying issues prevalent in their neighborhoods. Participants are required to maintain a 2.5 G.P.A., complete 25 community service hours, and build upon their leadership skills by joining a school-based club or group.

The second challenge was recruitment. For many of the students this was their first introduction to a very structured and unique program. Unlike many of the previous programs offered, this program introduced the youth to activities and experiences that were very different from the norm. This includes but is not limited to etiquette, public speaking, poise, ballroom dancing, fine dining, college tours, job shadowing, and community service. Contrary to original notions, this was a major challenge because many of the early participants did not see these skills sets as behaviors that would be acceptable or beneficial to their lives.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and the challenge it is addressing, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? *(continued)*

The accomplishments of the participants are celebrated each year during a formal cotillion. With government dollars and assistance from the community, each participant is provided with formal attire, to include a ball gown, gloves and tiara for the ladies and a tuxedo and top hat for the young men. In addition, each child has the experience of riding in a limousine and enjoying an evening fit for a prince or princess. The cotillion has been showcased in both electronic and print media as being one of the most successful programs serving youth in the City of Kissimmee and the greater Osceola County.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. *(300 word maximum) = 300*

Although Young Ladies of Excellence and Young Men of Distinction originated through the Kissimmee Parks & Recreation Department it was not a budgeted project. Therefore, the original expenses were offset by donations from citizens, organizations and City of Kissimmee personnel. The continued success of this program has been directly related to the partnerships that were formed since the program's inception.

The following is an example of the community collaboration that makes this program possible:

- City Of Kissimmee
- Kissimmee Utility Authority
- Osceola County School District
- Access Osceola TV-Channel 199
- Community Vision
- Walt Disney World
- Marshal's Stores
- Publix Grocery Stores
- Colonial Insurance
- Center State Bank
- CANDO Event Planning
- 20/20 Media

Volunteers generously give of their time to assist the youngsters with selecting their attire before the cotillion. They are dedicated to helping the young ladies with their ball gowns, hair and makeup the day of the cotillion. The same amount of time and energy is devoted to assisting the young men with their tuxedo to insure it fits properly. Witnessing the metamorphosis these youngsters undertake demonstrates the impact the YLE and YMD program is making as it enriches their lives.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (continued)

City of Kissimmee staff allocates countless hours to the coordination of the program in general, but also to the details associated with hosting the cotillion. The reservation fees for the Kissimmee Civic Center, which serves as the venue, are waived. Arrangements are made to present awards to the youngsters for special achievement as well as to acknowledge volunteers for their efforts. Staff must also dedicate a significant amount of time to speech writing. Catering is a focal point as this is an evening of fine dining and dancing. Staff also coordinates with the government access channel to film the festivities.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum) = 300

The Young Ladies of Excellence and Young Men of Distinction program has generated a host of quantitative outcomes. The program serves as a model to other Central Florida communities. Coordinators recognize the “40 Developmental Assets,” ensuring each of these assets solidify the validity of the program.

Core Components

- To Thine Own Self Be True ~ Promotes Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness.
- Am I My Brother’s Keeper ~ Interdependent Relationships
- Knowledge is Power ~ Education & Entrepreneurship
- For Love of Community ~ Community Pride & Responsibility

Measured Outcomes

- Since its inception in 2001, the program has enriched more than 300 children.
 - Since 2005, fifty-nine young ladies and 41 young men have successfully completed the program.
 - Since 2005, one teen pregnancy occurred. From 2001-2004, eight young ladies got pregnant and three young men were fathers.
 - In 2006, Jetanya Gumbs graduated with honors and attends college; Louis Williams attends Mid-Florida Tech; and Shakeitha Fisher attends Career Academy of Central Florida.
 - In 2007, Jaleesa Warren became gainfully employed; Dreama Martin enlisted in the U.S. Navy; Hassan Ortiz, Bobby McGee, and Martin Anderson attend college.
 - In 2008, four seniors will graduate.
 - The demographics of the participants have changed dramatically and better reflect our diverse community.
 - One of our 2007 participants visited Spain as part of an athletic exchange program.
-

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (continued)

Success Story

- Ivori Nesbitt is a senior honor student at Osceola High School and works part-time. She has been in YLE for three years and served as Vice-President for 1 year. She is also Vice-President of Best Buddies and a member of Students Achieving Strength & Success. She has devoted 13 years to the Girl Scouts, receiving numerous honors for her work. Ivori graduates this year and will attend the Art Institute in Ft. Lauderdale.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

Jacqueline Hunter, Program Coordinator, Chamber's Park Community Center, 407.932.3332,
jhunter@kissimmee.org

End of Application

See www.ncl.org/aac/ or the application instructions for detailed application instructions, sample applications from previous All-America City Winners, and more information. For questions contact: Kristin Seavey, kristins@ncl.org or 303-571-4343 ext. 1210.