

Getting Started

A PLAN FOR REVITALIZING THE SHAWNEE REGION



oneshawnee

Introduction

Working together for a better Shawnee Region.

Every day I thank God for the blessings He has given me. Holly and I have two beautiful children, Lucy and Leo, who are so full of life. I had the honor of serving the citizens of Massac County as their top prosecutor and now serve as state representative for the 118th district. The church we attend is a place of comfort, refuge, and spiritual guidance that cannot be replaced. The life Holly and I have built here in Southern Illinois is our American dream – but it’s a dream that is in peril for too many in our region.

Holly is the executive director for a local drug awareness coalition, and she can see the dream slip away from those who are plagued with addiction. I saw it slipping away from the hurt and abused in the courtroom, victims of those who prey on the weak. My brother can see it as a local principal – kids coming to school hungry, some looking for discipline and direction. And I can see it on people’s faces when I knock on their door to introduce myself. They know something has to change.

The Southern Illinoisan published a report in November of 2017, entitled *Forsaken Egypt: Poverty darkens Southern Illinois’ beautiful Ohio River Valley region*, which highlighted the hard numbers behind the severe rural poverty we see around us. For perspective, the Appalachian Mountain region - long studied by researchers and highlighted by politicians as the prime example of working class and rural America being left behind - has a poverty rate of 19.7%. The poverty rate of the nine counties comprising the Illinois portion of the Ohio River Valley region was 19.9% at that time. Our region is in crisis, and it’s time to act like it.

If we are going to forge a path towards eliminating persistent poverty and rebuilding communities, we must first acknowledge that path doesn’t run through our state’s capitol alone. The truth is that most politicians in Springfield aren’t concerned with the future of our region, and despite their political promises, outcomes haven’t changed for Southern Illinois. But, while it’s easy to use the state’s failures as a scapegoat for our situation, that

doesn't help us create solutions for a better future. The days of waiting around for the government to come rescue us are over.

The path to greater prosperity runs through every community, large and small - the villages nestled into the hills and hollows and the towns resting on the river banks of Southern Illinois. It starts with a commitment from every resident to break through the barrier of hopelessness and to dream bigger and work together.

How do we take our dreams of a regional revival and turn them into a workable action plan? The answer is to start somewhere. Keep reading to find out how we plan to begin the process.

Sincerely,

Patrick Windhorst

Patrick Windhorst
118th District State Representative



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A Region In Crisis

The numbers behind our story.

When we say that the region is in crisis, it's important to first understand the full depth of what that means. In turn, it becomes clear that something must be done and illustrates why our work will be important. In almost every measurable category related to poverty, the poorest counties in Illinois largely reside in the Ohio River Valley and surrounding Shawnee Forest region. The following numbers tell the story:

Population

The ten counties that make up the One Shawnee region had a total population in 2010 of 107,967. In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the population of those counties would be 100,149, which is a 7% reduction in population. During the same time period, the State of Illinois's population decreased by only 0.8%.

Poverty Rate

The percentage of those living below the poverty line in the ten-county region for the time period from 2014 to 2018 was 18.2% compared with a poverty rate for the United States of 14.1% and 12.1% for the state of Illinois.

Childhood Poverty

For 2017, the state of Illinois' child poverty rate was 17%. In the One Shawnee region, every county was above that rate with the highest being Alexander County at 50% and the lowest being Johnson County at 19.7%.

Median Household Income

In 2017, the state of Illinois had a median household income of \$63,044. In the One Shawnee region, the ten counties range from \$33,985 at the lowest to \$49,763 at the highest, which is still over 20% lower than the state's median.

Unemployment

In 2018, the state's unemployment rate was 4.3%. In the One Shawnee

region, the unemployment rates ranged from 4.4% in Hamilton County to 8.2% in Pulaski County with all but two counties being above 6%.

Educational Attainment

From 2012 to 2016, 8.8% of 25-34 year olds in Illinois did not have a high school diploma. Every county in the One Shawnee region, with the exception of Hamilton County, had more than 9% of its 25-34 year olds without a high school diploma. From 2012 to 2016, 48.4% of 25-34 years olds in Illinois had a degree beyond high school (associate, bachelor's, graduate or professional). In the One Shawnee region, the percentages ranged from 17.5% at the lowest to 36.3% at the highest.

Life Expectancy

In 2014, the male life expectancy at birth was 76.4 years in Illinois. Seven of the ten counties with the lowest male life expectancy, including the three lowest, were in the One Shawnee region. In 2014, the female life expectancy at birth was 81.37 years in Illinois. Six of the ten counties with the lowest female life expectancy, including the five lowest, were in the One Shawnee region. No county in the region had a higher life expectancy for males or females than the state's overall life expectancy.

Health Outcomes

Using cancer rates from 2012-2016, six of the ten counties have higher cancer rates per 100,000 than the state overall. Nine of the ten counties have higher cancer rates per 100,000 than the United States overall. The One Shawnee region has five of the top 10 counties in Illinois for cancer death rates per 100,000 from 1999-2017. Using statistics for the Center for Disease Control from 1999-2017 for Illinois, the One Shawnee region has the top three counties and seven of the top 10 for heart disease death rate; the number one and four of the top 10 counties for lung disease death rate; the number one county for Alzheimer death rate; the number two county for diabetes death rate; the number one and two of the top three for liver disease death rate; the number three county for homicide death rate; the number three county for suicide death rate; and the top two counties for accidental death rate.

Drug Abuse

Drug abuse can be difficult to quantify. Law enforcement often report arrests for methamphetamine, heroin, and other opioids, but that does not always provide an accurate picture of the drug abuse rate. Using statistics for opioid prescriptions gives some indication of the drug abuse rate for the region. In 2018, five of the 10 counties exceeded the opioid prescription rate per 100,000 people of the state of Illinois, which was 45.18. The highest county in the state was Hardin County at 206.7, and Massac, Saline, and Union Counties all exceeded 110.



Other People Do It, So Why Can't We?

What an example of community development found in an urban neighborhood can teach us.

The traditional field of community development is broad and diverse in its activities but narrow in its geographical focus. For decades, the plight of inner cities has driven the narrative when it comes to poverty in America and for good reason - low employment, violent crime and failing schools plagued those living in our crumbling urban centers. Too many Americans still endure those same conditions today. But for countless others, large scale neighborhood revitalization efforts are decades old in almost every major American city and are changing lives for the better.

Let's take a look at how community development has evolved according to a report from the Urban Institute entitled, *Revitalizing Neighborhoods* (Hendey, Pendall 2016):

“It arose in the 1950s and 1960s in reaction to top-down urban renewal initiatives that erased and replaced low-income neighborhoods rather than rebuilding them based on their residents’ preferences and demands (Klemek 2011). Starting in the early 1960s, the Ford Foundation’s Gray Areas Program funded the creation of neighborhood organizations in six cities to improve and coordinate services for youth.”

In short, community development evolved from a top-down approach spearheaded by the federal government to more holistic and resident-driven forms of revitalization efforts. This is the movement we see reshaping urban cores in mid-sized and big cities alike across America.

Most revitalization initiatives today start with the asset-based community development model. This strategy aims to first identify a community’s strengths so that they can be highlighted, improved upon, and ultimately

used as the catalyst for positive change in other areas. Assets are the starting point for an area looking to start the virtuous cycle, or a “spiraling up” process whereby successes (economic or otherwise) build upon and positively affect each other. To paint the picture of real world transformation and to demonstrate the model in action, we will examine the pioneering revitalization efforts of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in the Roxbury and North Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston, MA as written about in *An Introduction to Community Development* (Phillips, Pittman 2009).

DSNI was born in 1984 out of a desire from local residents to change the fortunes of their distressed neighborhood in inner city Boston. By the beginning of the 80’s, the Roxbury neighborhood was ravaged by property owners burning down their houses for insurance money and outsiders using the vacant lots to illegally dump their garbage and toxic waste. A small family philanthropy, the Riley Foundation, initiated, after a few initial bumps in the road, a neighborhood, resident-driven comprehensive planning initiative.

The authors of *Educate and Empower: Tools for Building Community Wealth* (Bhatt, Dubb 2015), point out that not one of the Riley Foundation trustees was a resident of the neighborhood. But, the foundation leadership quickly realized that for their endeavor to be successful, they would need to empower the people who lived there to be in control of the planning and the resulting outcomes. What followed was the creation of an innovative governance structure of 35 neighborhood board members that accurately represented the unique ethnic diversity of residents with representation from local businesses and social service agencies.

The initial members of DSNI started with something simple - something they could control. In an effort to clean up their neighborhood they tackled illegal dumping and worked to clean up their vacant lots. It was a tremendous success and built community togetherness, pride, and confidence. Over time, the initiative developed into something much bigger and more impactful than cleaning up trash, as described in *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Medoff, Sklar 1999):

“DSNI's major accomplishment has been, and continues to be, organizing and empowering the residents of the Dudley Street neighborhood to create a shared vision of the neighborhood prioritizing development without displacement and bringing it to reality by creating strategic partnerships with individuals and organizations in the private, government, and nonprofit sectors. That shared vision first emerged from a community-wide process conducted initially in 1987 that resulted in a resident-developed, comprehensive revitalization plan.”

Over the last 30 years through this community-wide process, DSNI and community partners have cleaned up and built new structures on old vacant lots - built schools and cradle-to-career learning hubs, community centers, parks and greenspaces, and affordable housing. They have built social capital through resident collaborations for small business growth and opportunity as well as established formal youth leadership pipelines and so much more. The outcomes for DSNI weren't necessarily centered on wealth creation but on quality of life and community pride.

Where does the DSNI's efforts intersect with the asset-based community development model? The part of this story that was left out is probably the most important. In 1988 the DSNI created a land trust. With the help of outside foundations and in collaboration with city hall, the resident controlled land trust began to buy vacant properties. What began the neighborhood's descent into distress - vacant and abandoned property - ended up their biggest asset as they began the process of rebuilding an urban village around a shared vision. Because the residents controlled a large portion of properties, via the land trust, they were able to control how and when their neighborhood redeveloped in accordance with their comprehensive plan.

The lesson here is that communities can and do rise from the ashes to better their situation. Dudley Street is not unique. Hundreds of these sorts of projects are underway in cities all across the country. What we must do is use these examples and the field of research around urban revitalization and figure out a way to apply it to our rural context. The geographic considerations may be different, but the ability of community members to

come together to find seemingly impossible solutions is not.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Before and After



In Need of a Community Quarterback

Breaking down silos and organizing together.

After 30 years in the trenches of neighborhood revitalization, the current leadership for DSNI comes nowhere close to doing all the great work that is happening in their community. Whether it be educational endeavors like youth development committees, mentoring and leadership programs - or economic strategies like workforce collaboratives, and small business development - or community development activities like beautification projects, and resident development programs - these initiatives and projects were born because a catalyst and organizing agent, DSNI, led the charge on tackling specific issues and areas of focus.

The role of an organizing force that brings different stakeholders together to solve real issues has become known in development circles as a community quarterback according to an article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review entitled *Community Development Needs a Quarterback* (Andrews, McHale 2014).

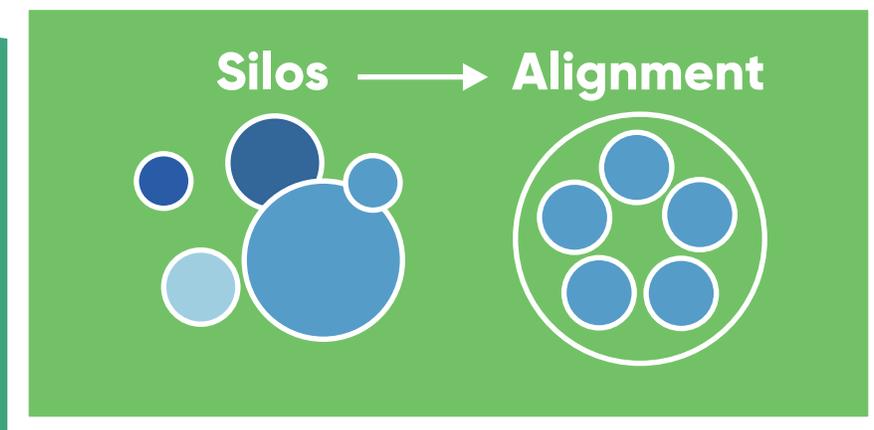
Tom Cousins is an Atlanta, GA developer and philanthropist. Cousins gave money for years to traditional regional and national urban poverty charities but saw no change in statistics illustrating generational cycles of poverty. He then decided to embark on something different. He sought to remake one neighborhood at a time starting in the East Lake area of Atlanta - one of the city's poorest and most distressed neighborhoods. In what would become a precursor to a nationally recognized model - Cousins transformed the neighborhood with the creation of quality mixed-income housing, the formation of a cradle-to-career educational pipeline, and an upgrade for community facilities and infrastructure. Since then, Cousins, his successful model, and billionaire Warren Buffet have teamed up to create Purpose Built Communities, an organization dedicated to helping other distressed urban centers implement the Purpose Built model.

While this model is specific to urban neighborhoods, read what Shirley

Franklin, CEO of Purpose Built Communities says about the necessary role of a community quarterback in her essay *It Takes a Neighborhood: Purpose Built Communities and Neighborhood Transformation* (2019):

“Arguably the most important decision Cousins made was to establish an organization focused exclusively on managing this effort. The East Lake Foundation’s sole purpose was to facilitate all of the initiatives needed to move the neighborhood from distress to health. The Foundation created the forum for engaging residents in the planning process, financed one-third of the infrastructure investment, and, perhaps most important, coordinated all of the public, nonprofit, and private initiatives so that the project unfolded at the right pace and in the appropriate sequence.”

At its core, the importance of a community quarterback is that it has the ability and desire to break down the silos of work going on in a particular place and start organizing people by pooling their intellectual, physical, and financial capabilities together, maximizing efforts to bring about positive change. Here’s the issue: there are many wonderful people and organizations doing great work in their own circle of influence or “silo.” But often, a city, a neighborhood, or a region’s issues are not at a scale small enough for these individual’s separate work to make a large enough impact. Moving the needle on a crisis level of rural poverty requires good people to put their heads together, long-lasting partnerships, and a comprehensive strategy around shared goals. The purpose of a community quarterback is to facilitate those activities.



Getting in the Game

Creating a Community Quarterback.

One Shawnee is a non-profit community development organization made up of a group of dedicated Southern Illinoisans working together to rebuild our home. Our purpose is to be a community quarterback for the region.

Our mission statement:

One Shawnee will generate planned action that culturally and economically rebuilds the Ohio River and Shawnee National Forest regions of southernmost Illinois on a shared vision of the future using a focused alliance of community groups, leaders, resource partners, and stakeholders.

One Shawnee's work will take place within all or parts of Alexander, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Johnson, Massac, Pope, Pulaski, Saline, and Union counties. These counties make up the 118th house district in Illinois and also include all nine of the counties included in the Southern Illinoisan report on poverty.

In the next section, we will take you through the timeline of concrete steps we plan to take going forward. But before we do, let's examine three areas where we believe One Shawnee can have a major impact.

Promoting unity in regional development.

One Shawnee will promote the unity of the region in its efforts to develop economically and culturally. The hard truth is that there is not enough people or capital in individual counties or communities to make the wholesale changes that are required to improve the prospects of the area. Pooling resources - human, financial, and social capital - will be a strong focus of One Shawnee. A success, whether it be a community project or the recruitment of economic investment, in Saline County is good for Hardin,

Gallatin and other surrounding counties and vice versa.

Changing the way Southern Illinoisans think of Southern Illinois.

Thinking long term, we want people, organizations, and businesses who don't currently live or operate in Southern Illinois to invest in the region. We want people to invest by moving their families here, businesses to invest by starting or expanding here, and philanthropic organizations to invest by funding programs here. These investments won't be made if Southern Illinois doesn't force it's collective psyche to revert from pessimism and isolation to pride and community togetherness. We can lure potential investments to our up-and-coming neck of the woods, not our down-and-out helplessness.

We want community members to begin to have a sense of pride in their region. Not because all of our problems have been solved, but because we are doing something about them. We want the region to believe there is hope - to understand that while we are struggling, we are on the move, dynamic and growing again for the first time in a long time.

Creating long-term action plans to develop the Shawnee region.

The aim of One Shawnee is to be a community quarterback, and the main function of a community quarterback is to plan for how to best organize people, capital, and institutions for the long-term success and sustainability of a community. The planning activity of One Shawnee will begin with limited preconceived notions and center on bottom-up community attitudes and opinions. Everyone - from the single mother living in a trailer, to a wealthy businessman and elected official - will have a voice in the work we do together.

Action plans will be derived from a community visioning process and centered around a region-wide shared vision of the future. And most importantly, they will look to tackle fundamental issues facing Southern Illinois with the goal of being implemented, rather than collecting dust as they sit on a shelf, forgotten.

Getting Started

A timeline for action.

So the question remains, what do we do now? We are glad you have read this far because here is where the work begins. And it is work. Work can be hard and frustrating and can feel like it takes too long. But what we must understand is that the systemic forces that have led to the decline of our corner of Illinois cannot be turned around overnight. There's no silver bullet, no flash in the pan, no marketing scheme that can reverse decades of gradual decline.

The only thing that leads to a better future for our home is **long-term, intentional, and strategic community development** around a shared vision we all get behind.

The following is the timeline we see for beginning this sort of work:

Community Assessment

The first phase of One Shawnee's work will be crafting and analyzing a community assessment. Before One Shawnee, or anyone else, can begin to do the work of revitalizing a specific geographic area, one must first have a holistic understanding of the region itself. Here is how we plan to do that:

Hearing From You

Right now, One Shawnee is asking that you help us by participating in at least one of several ways. We are conducting a Community Survey (found at OneShawnee.com) to gain a confidential perspective on the attitudes and opinions of the general public. Secondly, we will conduct focus groups throughout the region in every county to allow for in-depth conversations about our challenges and dreams. And third, we plan to also hold public town halls for anyone who would like to learn more about us and ask questions of One Shawnee's leadership.

Community Scan

Not only do we want to understand the feelings and opinions of the public,

we also want to understand and be able to analyze the underlying data behind the poverty we all see around us. Statistics and trend lines are metrics on which we can look back to from time to time to measure our impact.

Community Asset Map

And finally, we need a comprehensive directory of the different institutions - public, private, non-profit, and religious - that provide services and products to the region. Each one is an asset from which to draw upon as we work towards revitalization. Their input, in addition to the collaboration and partnerships formed among them during this process, are invaluable for the community development process.

All of the data and narratives from these three areas - community input, community scan, and community asset map - will come together to form a comprehensive Community Assessment. The assessment will guide us into the next phase and inform our decision making.

Community Visioning Process

The second phase of our work involves putting all that we have learned from each other and the data to use in the process of crafting action plans that get us to our desired state outlined in a shared vision of the future. The concept of a “shared vision” has been mentioned several times and appears in One Shawnee’s mission statement. But what exactly does it mean? A vision statement “provides guidance and direction for the actions that will be taken to make improvements. It is usually one sentence that embodies the desired state of the community in the future.” In addition, it must convey results that can be “realistically achieved within 15 to 20 years but should have enough ‘stretch’ to challenge the community to achieve dramatic positive change.” (Phillips, Pittman 2009)

It’s important that the vision we create to guide us is a “shared” vision. One Shawnee strongly believes that people support what they help create. Co-ownership of a positive vision means that we all have a say in how we revitalize the region and we all have a part to play in the actual work. Not because anyone is forcing others to participate - but because they want to.

With that said, a community visioning process gets us to the end goal of implementing attainable action plans. Here are the steps in the process:

Crafting a Vision Statement

As you have already seen, One Shawnee has a mission statement which conveys the purpose of the organization. When we speak about a “vision statement” or “shared vision of the future” - we mean the desired long-term outcomes for the region we all get behind. The vision statement will be crafted by One Shawnee in conjunction with regional stakeholders (public and private), and informed by the attitudes and ideas from the general public reported in the Community Assessment.

Identifying Priorities

The vision statement will serve as an umbrella guidepost, but the areas of focus will be determined by priorities identified by the general public. This is where the Community Survey and focus groups become really important. Both are structured in such a way to provide answers on what the public views as the important ingredients to regional revitalization. Those answers will become our focus.

Forming Task Forces

Once areas of focus, called “Key Performance Areas” (KPA), have been identified, task forces will be formed to address each KPA. Task forces will be made up of relevant stakeholders and individuals with expertise in the particular area. They will be tasked with formulating action plans, metrics to measure success, and overall goals.

While we look forward to facilitating new ideas and solutions, we must state clearly that One Shawnee does not have the ability to solve all of our immense challenges. No one does. However, we believe that there are key fundamental factors that disproportionately contribute to creating other tangential problems. Conversely, we want to identify the few areas of focus that One Shawnee can positively impact that will have an outsized effect on turning our fortunes around.

Identifying those key focus areas involve trying to find the spark that ignites a revival. To illustrate this point, we look to an essay Andy Smarick (2019) wrote for for the Witherspoon Institute entitled *Rewilding Civil Society*,

where he uniquely compares that spark to reintroducing species into an environment:

“In conservation biology, rewilding aims to reinvigorate an area by reintroducing species and natural systems that had disappeared. When we return, for instance, certain animals or grasses into a geography, an astonishing chain reaction occurs naturally. A set of predators interacts differently with a set of prey that interacts differently with trees and brush, which affects erosion, which influences water quality, and on and on. As a result, a new, more robust balance emerges. In other words, a complex system whose health was slowly compromised over time is revived through a cascade of positive changes set in motion by reintroducing one of that system’s previous components.

[...]

Importantly, rewilding includes the concept of “keystone” variables, such as a species whose reintroduction would have an outsized influence on the ecosystem. Social scientists and community activists could make compelling cases for a number of keystone social factors, such as marriage, crime reduction, or early childhood education. If policy could spark local initiatives dedicated to improving just one of these factors, positive results could ripple out expansively.”

The abiding work of the task forces under One Shawnee’s leadership will be to hone in on our “keystone” variables and create strategic plans to reintroduce them into the ecosystem of the Shawnee Region.

Implementation

Once the community visioning process is complete, hard work begins on solidifying buy-in from important stakeholders such as leaders of important civic institutions and local elected officials. From there, we all work in tandem on turning strategic plans into strategic action. Together, we begin to build stronger communities.

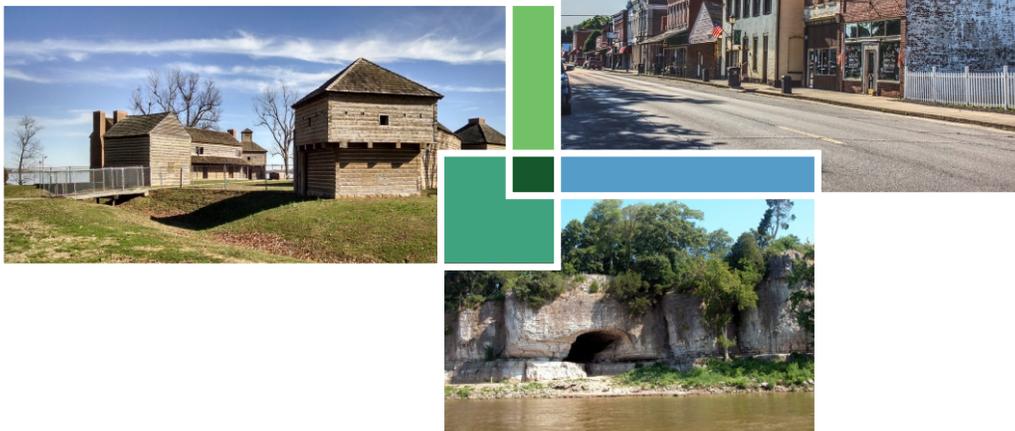
Help Us Grow

Are you ready to invest in Southern Illinois' future?

We have discussed our mission, the ability for others across the country to rebuild, our plan to learn from their example, and the formation of the group to lead the charge. For some, the mission and the plan might be enough to convince one to invest. But for others, we know it's not. There is only one last way to make the pitch - to tell you why it's important.

There are those - mainly society's elites - who would call on a people to pick up and leave, to recognize when something is lost and to fix it by moving to find new opportunities in thriving cities. We reject that notion. We reject that notion because it defiles the memory of those that have come before us. The settlers who designed and named our hometowns, the miners who broke their backs underground in the coal mines, the soldiers who manned the parapets at Fort Massac, and the generations of men and women who have harvested food and raised livestock on our rolling hills.

They made Southern Illinois their home, built its communities, and lived off the region's blessed resources. There is something almost spiritual about where people choose to put down their roots. It has meaning. The work of One Shawnee has meaning because every person, past and present, has intrinsic value. Because Southern Illinois has been built up by the blood, sweat, and tears of past generations, it cannot be so easily discarded and discounted.



Our work is important because there is dignity in recognizing that we have problems and then going to work to solve them. Every child deserves to grow up in a place they don't dream of leaving when they get the chance.

So, whether you live in Southern Illinois or somewhere else - whether you grew up here or are just interested in helping a struggling area - we appreciate you taking the time to read about our vision and ask that you consider donating your time, your talents, or your resources to helping us grow

**"Some communities allow
the future to happen to them.
Thriving communities recognize
the future is something
they can create."**

– Michael McGrath



building
stronger
communities

VISIT US AT ONESHAWNEE.COM