

“Opportunity Drive: 21st Street Initiatives”
Bank of America partners with the City of Wichita
Executive Summary

More than 11,000 children under the age of 18 live within walking distance of 21st Street, and what is now called Opportunity Drive. It is an area characterized by high crime, and at least 60 percent of children live with families at the poverty level or below. Many children live with single parents. Achievement test scores and graduation rates are low. Children born into this neighborhood learn early that opportunities for them are limited. For these children to grow up to be healthy, tolerant, thoughtful and contributing adults, they needed an environment different from the one that existed.

The community and business leaders in the area felt the need to take action. They joined together to discuss what could be done to improve the community. There was an opportunity to take advantage of a massive, deserted 20+ acre property. With the vision of business leaders and public sector officials, the group began to work on the 21st Street Initiatives. At that moment, the group began one of the greatest public-private partnerships that Wichita has ever seen.

The initiatives include: (1) A new pre-K Learning Center (TOPS); (2) A new 45,000 sq.ft Boys & Girls Club, and (3) A new elementary and middle school featuring the first early years international baccalaureate program in Kansas. These are new facilities, which are being constructed in the center of a low-income, high crime area, represented by a \$30 million investment; \$15 million from the private sector and \$15 million from the public.

The 21st Street partnership had several public and private partners. From the public sector there was: the City of Wichita, Sedgwick County, USD 259, and Wichita

State University. Private sector partners included: Bank of America, Cessna Aircraft Company, The Wichita Eagle, The Downing Family, Kansas Health Foundation, Intrust Bank, Commerce Bank, Cox Communications, Fahnestock Heating and Air Conditioning, Fourth Financial, Westar Energy, Raytheon Aircraft Company, Capital Enterprises, Insurance Management Associates and a host of community volunteers.

The City of Wichita, which owned the property, agreed to undertake all necessary site preparation for the new facilities- including streets, and all lighting, water and utility connections. Sedgwick County agreed to expand its financial support to the Boys and Girls Club for student rehabilitation. USD 259 agreed to construct a new international baccalaureate school in the area. Wichita State University agreed to expand its mentoring programs for fine arts to the Boys and Girls Club.

Completion of these superb facilities transformed a deserted parcel of property into a sea of activity which is alive with a rich variety of constructive programs for children. The neighborhood is reborn. Opportunities will be created. And for generations, the lives of thousands of children will be changed permanently in countless positive ways.

These extraordinary initiatives have been planned and implemented without federal government assistance. In the summer of 2007, President George W. Bush visited the facility to recognize this great partnership. For this and many other reasons, the project should serve as a blueprint for other communities aiming to improve the lives of children in economically challenged neighborhoods like the 21st street area in Wichita, Kansas.