

# The Columbus Dispatch

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Opinion

## Healthy influence

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This month will mark another big step in the evolution of the hospital, as it opens an \$800 million hospital and research facility. The project already has brought jobs and economic benefit to central Ohio and surely will continue to raise the profile of Nationwide Children's as one of the leading pediatric hospitals in the country.

But Nationwide Children's realizes that there's more to building success than just being present in a community. As it holds an open house for the public one week from today, on June 10, the hospital will highlight its commitment in recent years to helping revitalize the South Side neighborhood that it has been a part of for nearly 90 years. Simply put, success is a two-way street: Strong institutions and businesses benefit a community, and a healthy, vibrant neighborhood benefits all within it.

Well ahead of the opening of Nationwide Children's expansion, local businesses and neighborhood boosters were busy improving their properties to capitalize on the hospital's transformational investment. Business owners have spruced up

storefronts with the help of a grant from Lowe's stores; volunteers have put out flower planters, picked up litter and removed graffiti.

"There is a tremendous opportunity with the amount of money the hospital has invested in facilities. ...How can we piggyback?" Brian Higgins, secretary of the Parsons Avenue Merchants Association, told *The Dispatch*.

Higgins is also a board member of the Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Families initiative that the hospital launched when it announced its expansion plans in 2008. Dedicated to the physical and civic health of the South Side neighborhood, the accomplishments of the project so far include renovating or repairing 45 homes; pairing more than 100 Nationwide Children's employees with neighborhood children through Project Mentor; providing \$6 million in investment to local minority- and woman-owned businesses; and making available more than \$3 million in seed money for affordable-housing initiatives.

The city of Columbus also has made major contributions to the effort, including providing \$15 million worth of infrastructure improvements to Parsons and Livingston avenues.

And the partnership between hospital and community is just beginning, with much more in the works. All admit that a turnaround of a neighborhood that has struggled for decades won't happen overnight.

"You have to go in with your eyes open (and) know it's not going to be easy," said Bob Leighty, executive director of the Parsons Avenue Merchants Association.

But the area's chances are looking much better today because of the commitment of the hospital's leadership. When the resources and dedication of a great institution such as Nationwide Children's are combined with the passion and hard work of the community, everyone stands to benefit.