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Cuyahoga looks to L.A. for model of how to regionalize city services

LAURA JOHNSTON
Plain Dealer Reporter

Cuyahoga County's latest efforts to promote regional cooperation are modeled after the Los Angeles area, where county government assists dozens of cities with everything from firefighting to lifeguards.

Ohio's most populous county recently agreed to provide sewer maintenance for Shaker Heights and is talking about supplying a human-re-

sources worker for Brooklyn. And County Executive Ed FitzGerald envisions the county one day providing as many services as L.A.

"It is the only practical pathway to a significant degree of regionalism here," FitzGerald said in an interview Thursday. "And it's all by choice."

The goal, as outlined in FitzGerald's state-of-the-county address in February, is to eliminate the duplication of costly services in a county

divided into 57 municipalities.

The county's menu of offerings now includes employee health insurance, phone support, sewer maintenance and employee training. At least 10 cities have ordered one or more services. But there's no limit, FitzGerald said.

"I'm not putting a boundary on what we can do," he said.

Los Angeles County provides 59 services for 57 of its 88 cities.

SEE REGION | B3

"I'm not putting a boundary on what we can do."



Ed FitzGerald, Cuyahoga County executive

Commentary

PHILLIP MORRIS



Perspective gained with time away

The physician hosting our group for breakfast spoke with the confidence befitting a man said to be Brazil's best eye surgeon and one of its wealthiest individuals. If that résumé weren't platinum enough, Claudio Lotenberg's self-assuredness was undoubtedly boosted by his position as president of the Albert Einstein Jewish Hospital in Sao Paulo, which routinely ranks as the No. 1 hospital in Latin America.

I was still trying to decide what I thought of the youthful-looking, somewhat glib ophthalmologist when he abruptly made the decision for me. He started talking about Cleveland.

"I was recently in Cleveland visiting with people from the Cleveland Clinic. What I was particularly interested in was gaining a better understanding of that great institution and its commitment to social justice."

I nearly spilled my coffee. Did I hear this man correctly? I wondered. Is he really talking about my Cleveland?

He was.

Here I was, 5,000 miles from home, in a room full of celebrated journalists from around the world, and this man wanted to talk about the medically underserved of Sao Paulo's favelas, or slums, social justice in medicine and the Cleveland Clinic. I barely suppressed a smile. I also resisted the urge to talk over the physician and to tell him that a volatile conversation had been launched in Cleveland last summer on that very topic, except critics were saying that the Clinic was committing social injustice in medicine.

I thought to tell him that the Clinic caused many to question the depth of its commitment to serving the poor when it closed Huron Hospital in East Cleveland, characterizing the facility as an inefficient financial albatross.

I thought to tell him that city officials had predicted that the closing would create delays in EMS transports at a cost in lives and increased suffering. But I didn't. That December morning was not the time to challenge the eye doctor and his rosy view of the Clinic.

That was a moment for listening closely and learning, perhaps, as a renowned hospital leader from a different part of the world spoke glowingly of lessons he was taking from a premier Cleveland institution and applying to his own. That was a time for gaining a greater understanding of how Cleveland, the brand, is still viewed from afar.

SEE MORRIS | B7



JOHN KUNTZ | THE PLAIN DEALER

Shamarr Mitchell, 10, looks into the new Carson Reading Room during grand-opening ceremonies last month at the Carl & Louis Stokes Central Academy. The room and after-school enrichment classes were added to the school in the Promise Neighborhood program, which tries to weave schools, nonprofit groups and public services in a neighborhood to improve the lives of low-income children.

Little-known program is improving lives

Promise Neighborhood weaves services together for Central residents

I asked at least 10 parents inside Marion-Sterling School on Thursday if they had heard of the "Promise Neighborhood," and all shook their heads no.

They didn't recognize the name of the program that provides the computer classes they take. They didn't know the Promise Neighborhood is behind all of the new after-school activities for their kids, including the cooking class that culminated Thursday with a celebratory feast for moms and dads. The only exception was Charlotte Robinson, a single mother of two. To her, the ambitious Promise Neighborhood effort that is attempting to revive Cleveland's Central community is like the supportive family she never had.

Commentary

MARGARET BERNSTEIN



"Promise Neighborhood, they're helping me to the fullest," she said. Pamela Scott, hired in January to create and run an after-school program at Marion-Sterling, has become her go-to person. Scott steered her to computer classes, where Robinson earned a free laptop, and to a

program that will teach her to save for her daughters' college education.

"When I was low on food, she helped me. She knows I'm struggling," said Robinson, who lives in public housing across the street from the school. "I have no help. Seriously. This school is it."

The Promise Neighborhood is a national effort to improve the lives of low-income children by choosing one community and weaving schools, nonprofits and public services into a seamless pipeline that carries kids from birth to college.

Three years ago, the Central neighborhood was selected as Cleveland's pilot site because within its boundaries are not only two colleges (Cuyahoga Community College and

Cleveland State University) but also the city's largest concentration of residents in subsidized housing.

I've watched the Cleveland initiative take some lumps, twice falling just short of winning a sought-after federal grant. Clearly "Promise Neighborhood" is not yet a widely recognized phrase among the initiative's targets — Central's parents.

Still, the effort keeps rolling on, determined to do what sounds like the impossible: end the transgenerational cycle of poverty.

The resilient coalition of foundations, nonprofits and government agencies led by the Sisters of Charity Foundation this year moved from talking to doing.

SEE BERNSTEIN | B3

Commentary

MARK NAYMIK



Convicted crook still living large

Federal prosecutors are not ready to put former Cuyahoga County Auditor Frank Russo in jail.

But nothing is stopping us from putting him under house arrest.

Russo was sentenced a year and a half ago to a lengthy prison term for stealing a couple million dollars from us and creating a culture of corruption so pervasive that the harm it caused is immeasurable. He remains free — flagrantly so — as he helps prosecutors build cases against other officials and businessmen accused of corruption.

Our patience is gone because Russo, who is facing as many as 22 years in prison for accepting bribes and other crimes, displays no remorse. He hangs out in bars instead of sitting behind them. He dines in trendy restaurants instead of eating off steel trays.

Recently, a hidden camera captured Russo enjoying himself at a Cleveland nightclub that he frequented before he got nailed in the corruption probe. When WKYC Channel 3's hit man, Tom Meyer, confronted him last week about his bon vivant lifestyle, Russo played the victim.

Like many investigative reporters, Meyer loves to press his targets in the hope that one will take a swing. A punch makes great TV. Russo, though, just covered.

"What's life been like for you since you admitted you are a crook?" Meyer asked.

"You don't have to be that harsh with me," Russo complained.

Russo, who was working at a soup kitchen to rehab his soul and image, was dressed comfortably in jeans and a casual shirt with several buttons left open and his sleeves rolled up. He looked ready to step onto the ferry to Kelleys Island.

But he was terribly uncomfortable in the spotlight.

At one point in the interview, Russo squealed, "Please stop being so mean and cruel to human beings."

The episode clearly shows what Russo needs from us: more attention. Lots more.

So, let's give it to him.

If you see Russo out, politely suggest that he go home. Take his picture and share it online.

SEE NAYMIK | B7

West Side Market begins its centennial celebration

TOM FERAN
Plain Dealer Reporter

Keeping fresh for 100 years is something to celebrate. Cleveland started Saturday with an outdoor party opening the centennial celebration of the West Side Market.

Almost on cue for the event, a brief shower ended and sunshine burst out as the market day ended and a ceremonial ribbon-cutting reopened Market Square Park, across West 25th Street, after a million-dollar renovation.

"This is just another example of how the city of Cleveland invests in our neighborhoods," Mayor Frank Jackson said.

the future. This is symbolic of what we want to do for every neighborhood."

Councilman Joe Cimperman called the market "the only address in Cleveland that has a million families that call it home." He said the park was "always intended to be its outdoor dining room."

Helping to make that point, a diverse crowd of about 500 sampled free ice cream from Mitchell's Homemade and soft pretzels from Sterle's Country House, while an array of ethnic dancers and musicians provided entertainment that climaxed with fireworks at nightfall.

Some people arrived by intention, others by chance.

SEE WEST | B6

School rankings likely to dip with revamped report cards

EDITH STARZYK
Plain Dealer Data Analyst

Picture the student who has to bring home a report card full of dropping grades.

She hasn't actually done worse on her tests, but it looks as if she has because the whole grading system changed — and that's not going to make her parents happy.

Many Ohio school districts and charter schools could find themselves in a similar position next year when the state revamps its annual report cards, replacing current ratings with letter grades.

A simulation using data from the most recent report card suggests most rankings will tumble under a proposed system.

A CHART: See how your district's report card is graded. **B2**

Only 31 districts statewide would earn an A or A-, compared with 352 that got an "excellent with distinction" or "excellent" on the latest report card. And 52 districts would get an F, while none was in the state's lowest ranking of "academic emergency" last time.

In addition, almost 60 percent of the state's charter schools got an F in the simulation.

The change is being made so Ohio doesn't have to meet a key but ultimately unrealistic requirement of the federal No Child Left Behind law.

SEE SCHOOLS | B2

BERNSTEIN

FROM B1
Little-known program improves lives

The coalition launched several high-impact projects with the money it was able to raise.

At two of Central's three elementary schools, Marion-Sterling and Carl & Louis Stokes Central Academy, after-school enrichment classes to keep kids engaged were introduced in January. In other cities, keeping the school doors open after the final bell and offering quality after-school programming has improved student engagement and test scores.

A high point last week was the unveiling of the Dr. Ben Carson Reading Room at Stokes Academy. Sisters of Charity Foundation kicked in \$15,000 for the colorful reading space, named in honor of the famed black neurosurgeon. Books of all kinds beckoned to the children, including dozens of copies of Carson's memoir, "Gifted Hands," which tells the great story of how reading books as a boy was Carson's springboard out of poverty.

Carson sent a videotaped greeting for the occasion, and his wife, Candy, was there to explain the concept behind the pleasure reading rooms that she and her husband are establishing across the country. "The kids are reading for points, and they turn those points in for prizes. After a while, they learn to love learning, and you see their comprehension levels go up. Their grades go up, they're more active in school, so they're the ones that are less likely to drop out."

Another high-profile guest at the May 23 ribbon cutting was former Congressman Louis Stokes, who attended school in the same building when it was known as Central High. He donated a book about blacks who have served in Congress. Using his own story, he told the kids that no accomplishment is out of reach for them: Read about it, dream it and be it.

The national Promise Neighborhood movement is patterned after the well-known Harlem Children's Zone in New York, an ambitious anti-poverty effort spotlighted in the film "Waiting for Superman."

But Cleveland's organizers don't compare themselves to the Harlem effort. They have only a fraction of the funding enjoyed by the Harlem Children's Zone's charismatic founder Geoffrey Canada, who has two billionaires on his board and a budget that exceeds \$75 million a year.

In Cleveland, the Sisters of Charity Foundation has put in about \$1.3 million to keep the effort alive, and a mix of partners has chipped in another \$800,000 or so. The Cleveland, Gund and Bruening foundations are among the biggest supporters, and city and county agencies also have contributed to specific programs.

Unlike Canada, who oversees all zone-related efforts including schools, parenting classes and



Grand-opening speeches in the reading room do not interest kindergartners at Carl & Louis Stokes Central Academy on May 23. Instead, they grabbed some books and started reading.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN KUNTZ | THE PLAIN DEALER



Retired U.S. Rep. Louis Stokes reaches out to hug Principal Fatima Wright after he donated the book "Black Americans in Congress" to the Carson Reading Room at Stokes Academy.

even an initiative aimed at reducing asthma, Cleveland's effort takes a cost-effective approach of organizing and linking schools, nonprofits and other institutions that already exist.

"We're the connector and convener that's helping them all work better together," said Sisters of Charity Foundation President Susanna Krey. "That's a very different model."

Cleveland's Promise organizers

are gearing up for their annual run at a federal grant. The application is due July 27, and the grant will be worth about \$5 million a year if they win.

They always come tantalizingly close. In 2011, Cleveland's application was ranked sixth, but only the top five were chosen.

If they win it this time, Krey says they'll use the grant to build more connections. For instance, they'll hire a strategist to hunt

for young people who have dropped out of school, to help connect them with GED programs and job training.

Quality programs abound in Central, it's just a matter of getting residents to be aware and take advantage of them. "We need to sort this out. There's not a lot of uptake of these opportunities from families," Krey said.

Groundwork laid by the Promise effort led PNC Bank to

donate about \$50,000 through United Way to bring a program called SPARK to Central.

She didn't instantly recognize the Promise name, but a mom at Marion-Sterling's cooking class party beamed once she realized that Promise helps provide the backpacks that assist her 4-year-old in getting ready for kindergarten. Once a month, a SPARK worker drops off a backpack filled with books at her home, reads to the child with the parent present and asks the parent to read every day.

It's not a household name yet, but Promise is already a strong force that's getting parents involved and engaged.

Marion-Sterling Principal Gerard Leslie says he's seeing many new faces among the moms and dads showing up to take advantage of after-school computer classes and other programs aimed at them.

He's one of many who believe Promise is using its limited dollars smartly by bringing all the stakeholders to the table, for once. "You have more services in the Central neighborhood than you have in some suburbs. We want to connect parents to the resources so they understand everything they need is right around the corner — they just didn't know it existed."

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REGION

FROM B1
Goal is eliminating duplication of services

The concept came about in 1954, as the population in suburban Los Angeles boomed. Lakewood, Calif., wanted to incorporate without having to build up city departments, so officials created a system in which the county would provide the vast majority of services. Now those services reach about 7 million people in what are called "contract cities," including cities outside the county limits.

In many towns, for example a sheriff's lieutenant serves as the police chief.

"We're able to provide our services in many cases at a far cheaper rate than cities would otherwise be able to afford," said Los Angeles County spokesman David Sommers. "It's a model that works."

The model is being replicated across the country, as cities with tight budgets ask counties to step in, said Jacqueline Byers, director of research and outreach at the National Association of Counties.

"There are a lot of them doing things like garbage pickup, water, the things easiest for them to farm out," she said. "It's been done for years and years. What has exacerbated it is the economy."

In Cuyahoga County, Brooklyn can't afford a human-resources department, or even one human-resources administrator. So a part-time law director has been filling in. But Mayor Richard Balbier is on the verge of signing a deal with the county for a human-resources worker to assist one day a week, for \$32 an hour.

"This is a perfect solution," said Balbier, who's interested in other areas of collaboration as well.

Cuyahoga officials are brainstorming other offerings, getting ideas from Summit County, which has merged health and building departments with Akron and provides police protection for a handful of communities.

Cuyahoga County's information-services and human-resources departments have drafted brochures to market themselves.

The information technology department can host websites and team up with cities to buy computers at a cheaper rate. Eventually, the department plans to offer to manage time and attendance systems, share electronic data storage, run a help desk and create a centralized call center for all government needs.

The department is partnering with Parma for a \$100,000 state grant to study sharing data networks. And officials presented a regionalism conference for the Ohio County/City Information Technology Association last month.

The county human-resources staff can train employees, with four-hour government-specific sessions in ethics, customer service and communications skills for about \$200.

"It's not so much what the county gets out of it, but what the county can provide," said Human Resources Director Elise Hara. "If it's a cost savings to municipalities, it makes sense that the county help the region that way. It becomes more of a collaborative effort."

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Ohio police departments stocking up on military surplus items

TOM BEYERLEIN
 Dayton Daily News

Police departments throughout Ohio are stockpiling millions of dollars worth of military gear — from army boots to mini-tanks — through a Defense Department program that provides law enforcement agencies free access to surplus weapons and equipment.

A Dayton Daily News investigation found budget-challenged Ohio departments are increasingly using military surplus to arm and equip their staffs — last year acquiring a record \$12 million in equipment and weapons through the Pentagon program.

That was more than a third of the \$33 million in surplus gear obtained since the program started in the mid-1990s. On top

of that, Ohio police have received more than 6,000 firearms valued at \$2 million, mostly M16 assault rifles.

Law enforcement officials like Maj. Robert Chabali, who heads the Dayton Police SWAT team, said the program gets extra life out of military equipment already purchased with tax dollars while giving police access to equipment they couldn't otherwise afford.

"Everybody's budget is dying," Chabali said.

But critics say the program is fueling an increasing militarization of police that has civil rights and public safety implications. They say heavily armed SWAT teams, originally formed to respond to rare events like sniper and hostage situations, now often are used for routine police

work like the execution of search warrants, sometimes resulting in botched raids and even deaths.

A mishandled marijuana raid by a Preble County SWAT team resulted in the 2002 death of Clayton Helriggle, who was shot as he came down a stairway. The SWAT team was later disbanded, and Helriggle's survivors received more than \$500,000 to settle a lawsuit.

Ohio SWAT teams have since carried out numerous other controversial raids with tragic consequences. Among them:

■ A Mansfield-area SWAT team shot and killed Gilbert Rush in February 2007 after storming his home in an investigation of the alleged theft of baby clothes from Walmart. Rush wasn't the target of the investigation. His survivors filed a civil lawsuit against

Mansfield and Richland County that is set for trial in federal court on July 30.

■ On Jan. 4, 2008, the Lima SWAT team chose to bust a suspected drug dealer at his girlfriend's home while she and her six children were present. During the forced-entry raid, a SWAT officer shot and killed the unarmed girlfriend, Tarika Wilson, as she held a baby. Police gunfire also wounded the 13-month-old baby in the shoulder and blew off one of the baby's fingers. The city of Lima settled a subsequent lawsuit for \$2.5 million.

■ In April 2009, former Ohio State University football player Derrick Foster, a Columbus code enforcement officer, shot and wounded two members of a Columbus SWAT team as they raided a place where Foster was

shooting dice. Foster mistook the police for robbers and fired through the door, his attorney said at a hearing. After a plea agreement, Foster was convicted of felonious assault and sentenced to five years in prison.

Ohio agencies in fiscal 2011 more than doubled their acquisition of surplus items like bulletproof vests, helmets, chemical and biological gas masks, military vehicles, computers and office furnishings, a Daily News analysis of data from the Ohio Department of Public Safety found.

Lost & Found

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