ST. LOUIS
Metropolitan Association
For Philanthropy

BUILDING COMMUNITY: THE NEW SPIRIT OF EAST ST. LOUIS
MEETING SUMMARY
JUNE 22, 1993

OVERVIEW

MAP members met with the Honorable Gordon Bush, Mayor of East St. Louis, Pamela Coaxum, Executive Director of the East St. Louis Community Fund, Louis Tiemann, President of the East St. Louis Community Fund, and Debra Moore, Director of the Institute for Policy Leadership and a resident of the East St. Louis area. In addition, resource people included Johnetta Haley, Vice President, and Ron Capek, Secretary-Treasurer of the East St. Louis Community Fund. Marilyn Hartnett, Monsanto Fund, served as the meeting moderator.

Following the panel discussion, MAP members went on a site tour conducted by the East St. Louis Community Fund.

PROFILE OF THE AREA

With the a goal of providing a context for discussion, Pamela Coaxum noted the following:

- In 1960, East St. Louis was declared an All American City by *Look Magazine*. Yet, since that time, the population has experienced a steady decline in population from 100,000 to its present 40,000.
- In 1958, the City had 1,104 businesses listed in the business directory. In 1990, that listing has declined to 142.
- Forty percent of the total population earns a median income of $13,000 per year.
- According to the State Department of Public Aid, three out of four East St. Louis residents are eligible for public assistance.
- East St. Louis has the youngest population in St. Clair County.

EAST ST. LOUIS' GREATEST CHALLENGES

Louis Tiemann opened the panel by noting that, in his opinion, the greatest challenges facing East St. Louis are reconstruction and the rebuilding of citizen involvement in the community via a plan of action. Communicating with the public the priorities of the city and mobilizing for action are key to long-term solutions.

By way of example, Mr. Tiemann pointed to the East St. Louis Community Fund, an organization created in 1991 as a result of a penalty paid by a business from

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a federal ruling. The $7 million contributed to the fund over the next seven years provides for annual grantmaking of $1 million in the East St. Louis area.

By serving as a catalyst, the Fund hopes to bring citizens together to work on common concerns and toward lasting solutions. Their first priority has been trash removal and clean-up efforts.

Debra Moore noted that the key to mobilizing citizens of the area is strong leadership and governance. She cited that residents are not well-informed on issues, nor are they informed on simple matters, such as who they contact within government to address specific concerns. She also noted that there needs to be a process for long-term, thoughtful planning for all city departments.

Mayor Gordon Bush acknowledged that while there are myriad issues facing East St. Louisans, the past twenty-four months in office have been productive. He noted that trash clean-up has begun as a result of the initiative and funding from the East St. Louis Community Fund. Further, an increase in police cars has occurred, as well as other accomplishments that are helping to renew the area. Economic development is on the rise, and conversation, dialogue and discussion about future opportunities for economic expansion are underway.

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