

## Leaving a Legacy --

### *John Stoops: Leader and Visionary*

John Stoops is passionate about his involvement in community service; is an excellent communicator, engaging in narrative storytelling with ease; is logical but empathetic and caring. John has a strong work ethic; is decisive and pragmatic; and is accomplishment-oriented. He is active in all realms of his life – hiking the trails, splitting wood, volunteering, traveling, and more. John has traveled extensively overseas (e.g., almost all Western European countries, Poland, China) and across the United States (e.g., Grand Canyon, Arizona, Colorado, Utah). John is a visionary, reflected in his dedication and leadership with Redbird Resilient, about what is needed to prevent drug addiction, to educate and increase awareness by all stakeholders, and to promote resilience in our communities.

John is 72-years-old, was born in Marietta, Ohio, and resides in Loudonville. He is married to Jane, and has two daughters, one son, three grandsons, and one granddaughter. John and Jane have one cat, Buster, and two kittens, Possum Cat and Bobcat.

John received a BS degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Ohio State University, March 1970. By working summers and part-time through each academic year, he was able to pay almost all of his education expenses. Subsequently, he received high-quality training where he was employed (Emerson Electric Co.); e.g., receiving education in finance and marketing.

John's career spans over a 35-year period, ultimately focusing on administration and management. For most of his career, he was employed by Emerson Electric Company. He started off at Therm-O-Disc in Mansfield as a product engineer. John was promoted to Vice President of Manufacturing in 1986. He transferred to Alabama in 1990, accepting the position of Division President of Emerson Heating Products, retiring in 2005. During his career, John was very successful in helping chart pathways to increasing profitability for corporations, making difficult decisions along the way.

John is a former President of the Rotary, and is a Rotarian currently. He is a co-Founder and President of Redbird Resilient.

### Redbird Resilient – Catalyst for Action

Redbird Resilient (RR) represents a grassroots community effort to address drug addiction prevention, to reduce drug addiction and alcoholism, to strengthen emotional wellbeing, and to promote resilience among individuals, families, and the Loudonville-Perrysville community. RR was co-founded by an energetic team – John (President), Larry Henley (Vice President), Catherine Puster (Secretary), and Steve Sullivan (Treasurer). Other members of their Board include three directors: Jerry Strausbaugh, Wendy Lemon, and Scott Kauffman. RR is grounded in a communication/coordination model, interconnecting with schools, businesses, social service agencies, churches, and the community at large.

So what were the statistics that they couldn't walk away from, for which caring community residents "accepted responsibility" to find solutions: 20% (200/1000) of students in the Loudonville-Perrysville school district receive kinship care due to having parents judged to be unfit due to, for example, drug addiction, mental illness, being imprisoned, being abusive. Number of kinship care families = 100, which John indicated "may only be scratching the surface." Also, the prevalence of drug addiction at a local, state, and national level can only be defined as an epidemic, one for which there is no clear-cut "cure." The Loudonville-Perrysville community forged a coalition, taking on the challenge of addressing serious issues.

Effects of adverse childhood experiences reverberate, affecting children's mental health, academic success, being able to take advantage of a solid education, to find good jobs and to become productive adults. What is needed to promote resilience among all stakeholders, to help children and youth bounce back from adverse experiences, to develop and strengthen trauma-informed communities? What types of "effective" and "proven" programming could be implemented, be adapted if the initial approaches didn't "work?"

RR's vision is clear, the challenge now is continuation of implementation, finding optimal solutions that "fit" for meeting needs unique to communities. During Year 1, RR focused on (1) promoting awareness of drug addiction to youth, parents, families; (2) providing preventive education to all segments of the community through, for example, events and presentations, articles, social media, flyers; (3) searching for the optimal way to provide support (e.g., adopt-a-grade programs). In July 2019, RR celebrated its first birthday.

So what are the next steps for RR? John indicated that "we will remain a Loudonville-Perrysville-focused community group, working to make our community more resilient and a great place to live in! If receptive, we will assist other communities to establish similar groups and maintain communication to drive improvement throughout the county." One could argue that RR could serve as a "model" community grassroots effort.

During the next calendar year, RR will (I have embedded quotes from John) : (1) continue to offer community events to provide information, to promote awareness, to address issues threatening to families, children, the community; (2) continue to "look for ways to support and comfort community members in need;" (3) "advance efforts to mentor children;" (4) "strengthen our working relationship with key Ashland service providers such as ACCADA and Appleseed," as well as establishing partnerships with other organizations (including Catholic Charities Services and Job and Family Services).

RR looks toward addressing needs of at-risk children. What protective factors can be promoted and developed to foster resilience? How can we foster feelings of being loved, cared for, and respected? John used the word "vaccination" to describe what needs to be in place, to provide opportunities for growth, experiences, activities, and linkages with role models that would position at-risk youth to be good decision-makers, to make good choices. The end result: building self-esteem, sense of confidence, and strong personal values; leading productive lives.

RR's efforts and successes have implications for promoting "health and resilience" among youth, families, and communities, for improving quality of lives. There are other potential fiscal and

societal ramifications as well – building stronger workforces, strengthening our economy, reducing expenditures in mental and physical health care and in the criminal justice system.

For more information about RR, please visit <https://redbirdresilient.org/> and <https://www.facebook.com/redbirdresilient/>. Consider signing up to be on their mailing list. Be sure to attend the next community event “Vaping Epidemic? What Should I Know?” on Thursday, November 14, 7 pm, Ohio Theater in Loudonville, presented by ACCADA and UH.

### *Quotes from Those Who Know John Well*

- Bethany Paterson, Executive Director, MUGS, shared “He loves connecting people to each other, to resources, and to opportunities that better them and bless this community. He’s not one to see a need and sit idly by, using retirement as an excuse to not engage. Rather, he uses his passion and his position to make a difference in new and creative ways, and we are all better for it.”
- Louise Conn Fleming-Dufala, Emeritus Professor, Director of Center for Civic Life, AU, indicated “When the Center tackled the issue of what others can do about the opioid epidemic, John took the citizens’ role very seriously. He, with others, began studying the problem in Loudonville. Instead of being intimidated by the enormity of the problem, he decided he could do something. Since then, he has led efforts to make a difference in Loudonville, helping to found and carry out the work of RR. He is a go-getter, always asking himself what he can do, not what other should do. I respect John’s “can-do” attitude, and I am honored when I work with John on issues of concern.”
- Jerry Strausbaugh, Executive Director, Appleseed CMHC, noted: “John Stoops is a vibrant example of a life lived generously. He could have settled into a retirement focused on comfort but instead he is pouring out his time and energy to make his community of Loudonville a better place. He is doing this not simply by donating money but through his own blood, sweat, and tears. John is the heart and soul of RR, a local nonprofit focused on eliminating the addiction problem in the Loudonville-Perrysville area. John’s persistence and dedication make it difficult to say “no” when he asks for your help because you know he is rolling up his sleeves to work right beside you. John is a blessing to everyone he comes in contact with and a treasure to Ashland County.”
- Catherine M. Puster, Superintendent, Loudonville-Perrysville Exempted Village School District, shared “His dedicated work in the Rotary and his current work in RR is critical for these organizations to succeed. The leadership he demonstrates is one of transformation and service. He devotes time to helping others in ways that are so broad in scope that he is changing the culture of the community. His knowledge and experience inspires those around him with motivation to improve ourselves as well as help each other to grow. John is very interested in helping the community understand the opioid addiction problem as well as the mental health issues that face our communities. He has worked very hard to bring people from all across the community and county to inform and bring awareness to these epidemics.”
- Steve Stone, Executive Director, MHRB, indicated: “John is the consummate community volunteer. He is organized, persistent and has a high degree of integrity. Most importantly, John is a man with a great vision. John’s role as one of the founders of RR is a true reflection of John’s commitment to make the world a better place by starting

in our own backyard. John, along with other community leaders, have worked hard to foster strong relationships with other partners, especially with Superintendent Puster and the Loudonville-Perrysville Schools...John is eager to promote the project beyond the Loudonville area and to work with other school districts throughout the county to do something similar. The vision in John's mind is carried out by his hands and feet – vision plus action is the John Stoops' formula for improving our community!"

### Closing Comments

John has built a strong legacy in multiple ways. Let me share my reflections about who he is, not just what he has done:

John cherishes life; his wife and family; friends world-wide and from all walks of life; being able to make a difference. He has faced and overcome physical health challenges, and is grateful for good health and a high energy level. He looks to the future, what he can do now rather than focusing on accomplishments from his past. John blends his strengths – a connector, a communicator, an educator, a leader, and a visionary – in his dedicated work with RR.

When asked about principles that have guided his life, his thoughts about how to live life well, and what words of wisdom he would share with others, several themes arose: First, be confident and decisive, give your “all” in pursuing your dreams. “Never be afraid to make decisions that you think are right.” Rather than becoming paralyzed or frozen, take advantage of opportunities by “starting down the road.” When starting or navigating your career journey, “never rest until you find a job you really like,” discover one that you’ll enjoy doing, and you will do well and be successful. Second, even at advanced age, one can make a difference, be a powerful voice about social issues -- drawing on lived experiences and what has been learned across time. Third, focus on the “now” rather than the past. We can chart our lives at any point, change personal priorities and make this transition part of building one’s legacy.

In closing, John Stoops is a leader and visionary, working to solve problems rather than simply observing and talking about them, forging connections, and using his expertise to make a difference. We are blessed that he has gifted our communities by volunteering, his commitment, and his passion.

Diana Spore, PhD, Member, OABHC