

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

GALESBURG, ILLINOIS

Galesburg, a small city in northwest central Illinois is a three-hour drive from Chicago and 50 miles northwest of Peoria. The town's biggest employer was Maytag, until more than a decade ago, when the manufacturer closed its Galesburg facility. Although the subject of media attention, presidential visits, and even a book dedicated to the relocation of the plant, the town struggled to regain traction.

Galesburg “by the numbers”:

POPULATION:
32,000

CHALLENGE:
Economic
development,
bridging divides

FOCUS: Heart &
Soul Statements to
guide decision-
makers

KEY TOOL:
Community
Network Analysis

- 1858 - the year of the famous debate at Knox College in Galesburg between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas who were vying for a seat in the U.S. Senate.
- 2004 - the Maytag plant closed, and 1,600 jobs were lost, compared to 5,000 people employed at its peak in the 1970s.
- Seven main rail lines come into the city.
- 150 (approximately) trains move through Galesburg daily.

Local conditions:

Galesburg was a stop on the Underground Railroad; hosted the best known of the Lincoln-Douglas debates; was home to poet, author, and historian Carl Sandburg. Ronald Regan spent one year of elementary school here, and Nancy Regan visited her grandparents here as a child.

Galesburg hit the national radar in recent times, when Maytag, its largest employer, closed its refrigerator factory in 2004. Galesburg's population is the lowest it has been since the 1950s. Median household income is \$33,369 compared to \$57,166 for the state.

Volunteer and Community Response:

In 2015, the Galesburg city council appropriated \$50,000 and, with the Galesburg Community Foundation, which also funded the project, committed to Community Heart & Soul. Galesburg is avoiding the typical strategic planning approach where consultants come in, hold “stakeholder” meetings, leave, and write a report. Instead, Galesburg on Track, the name of their Community Heart & Soul project, was focused on listening to the stories of the people who live in the community. To know where Galesburg wanted to go, residents needed to appreciate their past and understand what they cherish about where they live.

Economic development is one challenge facing Galesburg. Divides are another. Community Heart & Soul's unique way of mapping all groups in a community to see who's connected to whom helped bridge divides and led to community building discoveries that represented first steps to building a stronger community.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

The Community Heart & Soul team visited neighborhoods to speak with people face to face. This not only built trust with residents, but it also bridged divides. Several team members went to areas where they had never before spent time.

The city's faith leaders came together to meet for the first time as a result of Heart & Soul.

When volunteers with Galesburg On Track learned about children who were food insecure during the summer months, they responded by putting together a backpack lunch program.

Recreation was a key theme that emerged when residents told their stories as part of Heart & Soul, so the fire chief started a "walking school bus" to get school children walking to school, instead of taking the bus.

