

Initiative Overview (Kicked Off August 2005)

- Distributed over 500 welcome packets during and after Kick-Off.
- Produced and distributed baseball hats, posters, window clings, magnet, pens and business cards for partners to show their support.
- Created website to provide a central information point for partners, printable flyers and an area for shared resources from Partners.
- Completed a banner project which resulted in 144 Character Ed banners stretching seven miles across Springfield, creating great visibility for the program, as well as generating sponsor income.



- In partnership with local television and radio stations, produced PSAs about the monthly character words.
- Participated in a joint project to create Missouri State University/YMCA "Character Sports Cards" featuring college athletes, distributed to all local K-5th grade students.
- Presented two training sessions to help partners incorporate the program in their place of business.
- Purchased a mascot to lend presence to community events and make appearances at partner organizations for character activities.



Character Words

Attitude - January

To be positive when dealing with others, to believe in yourself, and to approach challenges with optimism.

Courtesy - February

To be polite and considerate, to act with manners, and to be generous and helpful with others.

Self-Discipline - March

To work hard, to control your emotions, actions and impulses, and to give your best in every situation.

Trustworthy - April

To be reliable, to follow through with your responsibilities, and to inspire others to believe in you.

Dependable - May

To be consistent in your actions and behavior, and to be steadfast in doing what is needed or expected of you.

Cooperation - June

To be helpful, to work with others for the common good, and to be a willing and productive team player.

Integrity - July

To behave in accordance with your values, to be sincere, and to be faithful to what you believe is important.

Accountable - August

To consider the consequences of your actions, and to recognize that you are held liable for your choices.

Respect - September

To show consideration for the feelings and rights of yourself, others and the world around you.

Responsible - October

To follow through with your commitments, to be reliable, and to use good judgment in making decisions.

Caring - November

To be interested and concerned about others, and to treat them with understanding and compassion.

Honesty - December

To tell the truth, to be fair and straightforward, and to lead a life of honor and dignity.



Character Education

Character Ed is a community-wide character education initiative working to create a "culture of character" in the Springfield area through the united efforts of business, schools, civic organizations, the faith community, and the media.

www.CharacterEdSpringfield.com



The Character Ed initiative is managed by the Ozarks Regional YMCA and the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce.

The Challenge

A few years ago, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce asked area employers what they needed most from their employees in order to be successful in their business. Their response was surprising; rather than naming a specific skill set, employers said they needed employees with good character. The employers pointed to so-called foundational characteristics like arriving at work on time, treating colleagues with respect, and performing assigned tasks honestly, as the most critical. According to the employers, if employees lacked these characteristics, they would not succeed at work, despite having good technical skills or professional experience.

The Initiative

Realizing the value of character in both education and workforce development, the Chamber researched how other communities have addressed similar concerns. Building upon examples of school-focused programs, the Chamber created a model for character education that encompassed the entire community.

A Chamber committee of business and community leaders decided to create awareness of character by selecting 12 character traits and asking businesses, schools, civic organizations, the faith community and the media to focus on one trait each month throughout the year. After whittling down the choices, the committee released 25 “character words” out to the Springfield community and asked for their opinion. Through paper surveys in the newspaper and at libraries, as well as through an online survey, the community was able to vote on what character traits they most valued. Votes were tallied and the top 12 words were each assigned to a month to create the plan for the first year of Character Ed.



During the voting process, a local artist developed the “Character Ed” logo to personify the initiative. The idea was to create a look that could appeal to both children and adults and would be applicable in a number of situations.

The Partners

To build community support, Chamber staff and volunteers met with organizations of every kind, asking them to sign up as Character Ed Partners. Signing on as a partner is simply a pledge to emphasize the character word each month in one’s place of business. By August 2005, Character Ed could boast more than 500 partners, far exceeding the original goal of 100 charter partners.

The Kick-Off

On August 23, 2005, the Chamber hosted a celebration for the Character Ed launch at Hammons Field, the home of the Springfield Cardinals AAA baseball team. Character Ed partners in attendance received a welcome packet full of information, while the community at large received commemorative t-shirts and hats. Deborah Price, the assistant deputy secretary of education from the U.S. Department of Education, gave a keynote talk on the importance of character education at the national level. With the help of local high school cheerleaders, Mayor Tom Carlson concluded the event by officially announcing the 12 chosen character words to the assembled crowd of more than 300.



The Plan

The Character Ed initiative is designed to be a simple and flexible program, whereby partners incorporate the “word of the month” in whatever way it fits with their organization. The Character Ed website provides resources like word of the month definitions, printable flyers and resources shared from the Partners.

Each organization can decide how and to what extent they focus on the character word each month. Suggestions include forwarding the monthly flyers to peers,

friends and employees, talking about the character word during meetings, hanging Character Ed posters in break rooms and other public areas, and adding the word or quotes to publications and pay stubs. The Chamber produced posters, magnets and window clings for partners to hang in their facilities and show their support for the initiative.



The Future

Since Character Ed was launched, its impact has been impressive. The word of the month is highly visible across Springfield, featured on the marquee of banks, convenience stores and schools. The posters can be found in classrooms, store windows and in company cafeterias.

A number of partners have developed innovative ways to incorporate the initiative into their everyday, from recognizing and rewarding employees with character, to character-building activities for kids at the local YMCA. A full overview of the first year’s accomplishments can be found on the reverse.

As planned, the original set of 12 character words continues to be used each year. In 2007, the Ozarks Regional YMCA agreed to help the Chamber manage the initiative, a natural fit given their involvement with Springfield area children and business community. As always, the YMCA and Chamber will continue to look for new and creative ways to build awareness of character education and its importance to the Springfield area community.