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CountryMark Donates \$125K to Mt. Vernon Stellar Communities Fund

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Mount Vernon's efforts to be named a "Stellar Community" recently received a major boost when CountryMark made a \$125,000 donation to the city's Stellar Communities Fund.



Earlier this year, Mount Vernon was selected as one of six finalist cities in Indiana's Stellar Communities Program, with the two winners to be named later this summer. CountryMark's gift will go toward projects to spur economic development, revitalize the community, and create exercise opportunities and an appreciation of the natural beauty of this southern Indiana river town. In addition, the gift will enhance the city's chances in the Stellar Communities competition.

"Mount Vernon has developed an excellent plan, and we saw this as a good opportunity for CountryMark to demonstrate its ongoing support for our community by being part of an outstanding program that the state of Indiana has developed for rural cities and towns," said **Pat Ward**, Vice President of Operations for CountryMark, and a member of the Stellar Communities Advisory Board. "The Stellar Communities Program helps smaller cities across the state aspire to better their communities, and gives them incentives for developing specific plans for accomplishing their goals."

Mt. Vernon's goals, as outlined in their Stellar Communities application, are impressive. Mount Vernon Mayor John Tucker has been optimistic about his city's chances of bringing home a state Stellar Community award because of the quality of the planning process and the community support they have garnered to date.

"This very generous donation from CountryMark will be huge for us," said Mount Vernon Mayor **John Tucker**. "When the scoring committee does their site visit, they will look at community participation and buy-in. When you've got a company like CountryMark that's partnered with you in a big way and shown this kind of community spirit – that will certainly speak volumes."

Since 2010, six Hoosier communities have been selected from over 60 applicants to the Stellar Communities Program. Each year, finalist communities receive funds to prepare an in-depth Strategic Investment Plan, and will have a site visit by the selection team. Later this summer, two of the finalists will

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be designated as this year's Stellar Communities. This will in turn open the door for those two communities to receive state funding with which to carry out their respective comprehensive plans. Those grants have typically ranged from \$8 to \$12 million.

Mount Vernon has identified eight proposed Stellar Community projects. The projects include:

- Finish the Riverbend Trail. This will extend one of the city's most scenic walking trails from 4th Street (SR 62) north to Brittlebank Park.
- Rehabilitate residential homes along the Trail. Through this initiative the City will provide home maintenance assistance to approximately 15 houses per year along the Riverbend Trail.
- Build a Mount Vernon Community Center. A new multi-purpose community center would be constructed at the City-owned Kiwanis Park. The center would house indoor as well as outdoor events, festivals and celebrations.
- Develop a Riverbend Courtyard. Located at the beginning of the Riverbend Trail, this courtyard would highlight historical monuments at the courthouse lawn.
- Relocate the McFadin's Bluff historical marker. The marker had been located at the city fire station, which is in the process of being relocated. This project would create a park where the station once resided and provide a scenic backdrop to this historic landmark.
- ATi Building Expansion. ATi is within Mt. Vernon's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District and their expansion plans will create new jobs for the community.
- Redevelopment of vacant lots. The city would refurbish these lots and landscape them to as pocket parks as well as additional parking for merchants.
- Transportation planning. The plan would provide public transportation between the City of Mount Vernon and Evansville.

CountryMark is a farmer-owned cooperative and is Indiana's only American-owned oil refining, marketing, exploration, drilling and production company. It has operated a refinery in Mount Vernon since 1940, and between refinery employees and related company personnel, employs approximately 250 people at its Mount Vernon campus.

The Stellar Communities Program is a multi-agency partnership designed to encourage and fund comprehensive community development projects in Indiana's smaller communities. The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA), and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) are participants in this innovative program, which has been recognized nationally as a premier community development program.

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