



Spotlight on **BLUE SPRINGS**

M A G A Z I N E

Winter 2026
Issue 1, Volume 2

Downtown Revitalization	8
Parks & Rec Honored	10
Eagle Cam is Back	12

The Heritage Philharmonic

CONTENT DIRECTORY

The Heritage Philharmonic	4
Downtown Revitalization	8
Blue Springs Parks & Rec Honored	10
Eagle Cam is Back	12
City to Unveil New Website	14
Did You Know, Blue Springs...?	15

COVER PHOTO: The Heritage Philharmonic Performs its 80th anniversary concert in Helzberg Hall at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. Photo courtesy of Joe Snapp Studios.



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Blue Springs Communications Department Earns Two PRSA PRISM Awards

The City of Blue Springs Communications Department won two PRISM awards at this past October's Kansas City Public Relations Society of America PRISM Awards Ceremony. The City competed with the likes of St. Luke's Hospital, Advent Health, Trozollo Communications Group and Harvesters.

Nate Beck, Multimedia Specialist, won a silver PRISM for the North Pole Trail of Lights teaser video. Brian Spano, Communications Manager, won a gold PRISM for the *Spotlight on Blue Springs Magazine* that was rebranded and launched last July.

"I'm proud of the outstanding work our communications team continues to produce," Spano said. "This recognition from our peers is not only an honor, but also a reflection of our ongoing commitment to excellence and to serving our residents through effective, high-quality communication."



Psst, It's The Heritage Philharmonic **Eastern Jackson County Best Kept Secret**

In an era when arts organizations grapple with rising costs, shifting audience preferences and expanding digital entertainment, the Heritage Philharmonic, based in Eastern Jackson County, Missouri, continues to thrive by staying true to its roots: community, accessibility and a deep love of music. Now in its 81st season, the orchestra stands as Eastern Jackson County's only fully free symphony, a distinction that reflects both its mission and its enduring spirit. But this octogenarian is by no means showing its age.

The Heritage Philharmonic exists with a simple but powerful goal: to provide excellent, affordable and convenient orchestral experiences for the Jackson County community. Guided by a blend of volunteer and professional musicians, the orchestra celebrates lifelong musicianship and strives to remove barriers to the arts for audiences of all ages.

"We are committed to removing barriers so everyone can enjoy live orchestral music," Music Director and Conductor James Murray said. "Our free admission policy is a cornerstone of who we are."



The Independence Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1944 when Franklyn Weddle, Music Director of the Reorganized

Church of the Latter Day Saints (RLDS), recruited a small orchestra to accompany the annual production of Handel's Messiah. Twenty-eight musicians signed

monia: County's

on, and the orchestra was born. In the following year the Community Music Association (CMA), a group organized by leaders of 25 Independence organizations, began the work to sponsor a community orchestra.

In the fall of 1945, an orchestra called the Independence Little Symphony was formed with 38 musicians. From 1945 through 1948, the fortunes of the orchestra rose and fell with several fundraising campaigns barely keeping the orchestra alive. Champions from the community persevered, and in 1948, the orchestra, some 60 musicians strong, was renamed the Independence Symphony Orchestra.

The years since have proven to be robust as the orchestra's concert schedule has grown, and additional outreach initiatives have been undertaken. Harold Neal followed Franklyn Weddle on the podium. Conducting the orchestra for more than a decade, Harold provided music excellence to the community. After he retired, Jack Ergo led the orchestra for 25 seasons. Jack was named Conductor Laureate in the Fall 2006.

Roughly two decades ago, the group embraced a new identity, the Heritage Philharmonic, to reflect its service to the entire region, not just one city. Today, the orchestra includes more than

60 musicians spanning students, amateurs and professionals.

What truly sets the Heritage Philharmonic apart is the

diverse blend of its players. Most are volunteers, teachers, engineers, nurses, retirees and other community members who simply never stopped playing their instruments. They come together each week with students and a handful of professional musicians who help lead their sections.

"Everyone walks into rehearsal with a shared goal and respect for each other," Murray said. "We also have a lot of fun. The first rehearsal each fall feels like a giant reunion."

That camaraderie, coupled

with the thrill of making music collectively, is what keeps many returning year after year.

Beyond its main stage performances, the Heritage Philharmonic has invested deeply in the next generation of musicians. For more than 20 years, the organization has awarded scholarships and performance opportunities to standout area students.

The Philharmonic regularly collaborates with local schools and community organizations. Its concerts have featured handbell choirs, middle school choirs, high school orchestras and even performances at the Truman Library and Independence Square. During last season's 80th Anniversary Celebration, choirs from Truman High School, Blue Springs South High School and William Jewell College joined the orchestra for a powerful

Heritage Philharmonic: At a Glance

Founded: 1944 (as the Independence Symphony Orchestra)

Current Season: 81st

Music Director & Conductor: James Murray

Musicians: 65 (mix of volunteer, student, and professional players)

Unique Distinction: Eastern Jackson County's only orchestra with free admission

Mission: To provide the Jackson County community with excellent, affordable and convenient orchestral music programs by using both professional and volunteer musicians. We celebrate lifelong musical skills development for all levels of players.

Community Engagement:

- Young Artist Competition (20+ years)
- Collaborations with local schools and community choirs
- Holiday concerts featuring middle school and handbell choirs
- Performances at community locations including Truman Library and Independence Square

Nonprofit Status: 501(c)(3) organization

Learn More/Get Involved: Attend a concert, join the Board of Directors, support through donations or spread the word to help keep live orchestral music free and accessible.



community showcase during the performance at Helzberg Hall inside the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

In the near future, the Philharmonic aims to broaden its audience and increase regional visibility. Long term, one of the orchestra's greatest aspirations is to secure a dedicated performing arts venue, a permanent home befitting its legacy and mission. Most concerts are performed at the Blue Springs High School Performing Arts Center.

"We'd love to no longer be the best-kept secret in Eastern Jackson County," Murray said.

Murray himself joined the Philharmonic more than two decades ago as an assistant conductor. A year later, he stepped in as guest conductor; by the end of that season, he was offered the role permanently.

But his favorite memory over that time has been leading the orchestra onstage at a packed

Helzberg Hall for the 80th Anniversary Season Celebration, a milestone performance that honored the orchestra's past and signaled its bright future.

"For a non-profit organization to endure, survive and thrive for that long is truly an impressive accomplishment," Murray said. "It's a testament to the hundreds of people involved with this organization over that entire history, board members, orchestra members, conductors and the audience members. It is also an affirmation that we are fulfilling a continuous need in our community to not only provide accessible concerts, but to provide a place for a variety of musicians to come and share their abilities with each other and the public."

For Murray, conducting this ensemble remains deeply meaningful.

"I feel humbled and proud," he said. "To bring together so many different people, different backgrounds, professions,

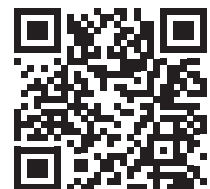
abilities, and create something that none of us could do alone is incredible. Live music is transformative in a way that earbuds can't replicate."

At its heart, the Heritage Philharmonic is an invitation, to listen, to discover and to be moved.

Murray hopes audiences leave concerts not only entertained, but refreshed, inspired and perhaps even changed.

"I want people to feel the impact of 65 musicians coming together to create something beautiful and shared," he said. "That's what live music is all about."

For more information about the Heritage Philharmonic and its current concert season, visit www.heritagephilharmonic.org.



5 QUESTIONS WITH...

Shantele Frie, Planner III, Community Development



HIGH

1 What do you enjoy most about your job?

What I enjoy most about my role as a City Planner is the opportunity to work directly with both developers and the community. I love helping shape future projects by collaborating with developers on ideas that will positively impact our community; while also serving residents and listening to their needs. Being able to guide projects that support the community's growth and help people in meaningful ways is very rewarding, and I genuinely love what I do.

2 How does your role make a difference in the community?

City Planners help shape how Blue Springs grows and what our community looks like in the future. They make sure new neighborhoods, businesses and public improvements are designed safely, fit our long-term plans and protect the character of our City. Overall, planning helps Blue Springs grow responsibly, stay safe and remain a great place to live, work and play.

3 Early bird or night owl?

I'm definitely a night owl. Since the military, early mornings are no longer my thing. I do enjoy the quiet time at night with a good book!

4 Dogs or cats?

I'm absolutely a proud crazy cat lady—I have three cats running my household. But recently, I was bribed into adding a corgi named Gina to the family, and now she thinks she's in charge. So, I guess I'm officially a cats-plus-one-bossy-corgi person!

5 Weekend getaway: Lake, city or mountains?

Wait—who made this list and forgot the beach?! As a Northern California girl, I'm 100% a beach person. I'm slowly adjusting to being land-locked in Missouri, but trust me, I will always pick ocean spray over lake waves!

City to Begin Downtown Revitalization Project

In August 2025, the City of Blue Springs adopted its 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. The Plan was the culmination of a 10-month process, working collaboratively with the Mayor and City Council, City staff, community leaders, and residents to create a framework to help guide the City's decisions, investments and priorities for the next five years. The City's Strategic Plan is a roadmap for how City leadership can work together, stay aligned and deliver results that matter to the people of Blue Springs.

One of the six priority areas of the Strategic Plan was "Downtown Revitalization," with the stated goal of "Continuing to develop Downtown to be a destination for the entire Blue Springs community with a variety of residential housing opportunities and diverse dining, entertainment and retail." The Strategic Plan alongside the previously adopted 2024 Downtown Masterplan has given the City renewed energy with its approach to Downtown Revitalization. Blue Springs voters had approved a \$40 million

bond in August 2024 for various improvements throughout the City, which included \$5 million for Downtown Master Plan Capital improvements, including sidewalks, curbs, and streetscapes.

The stated objectives for Downtown Revitalization are:

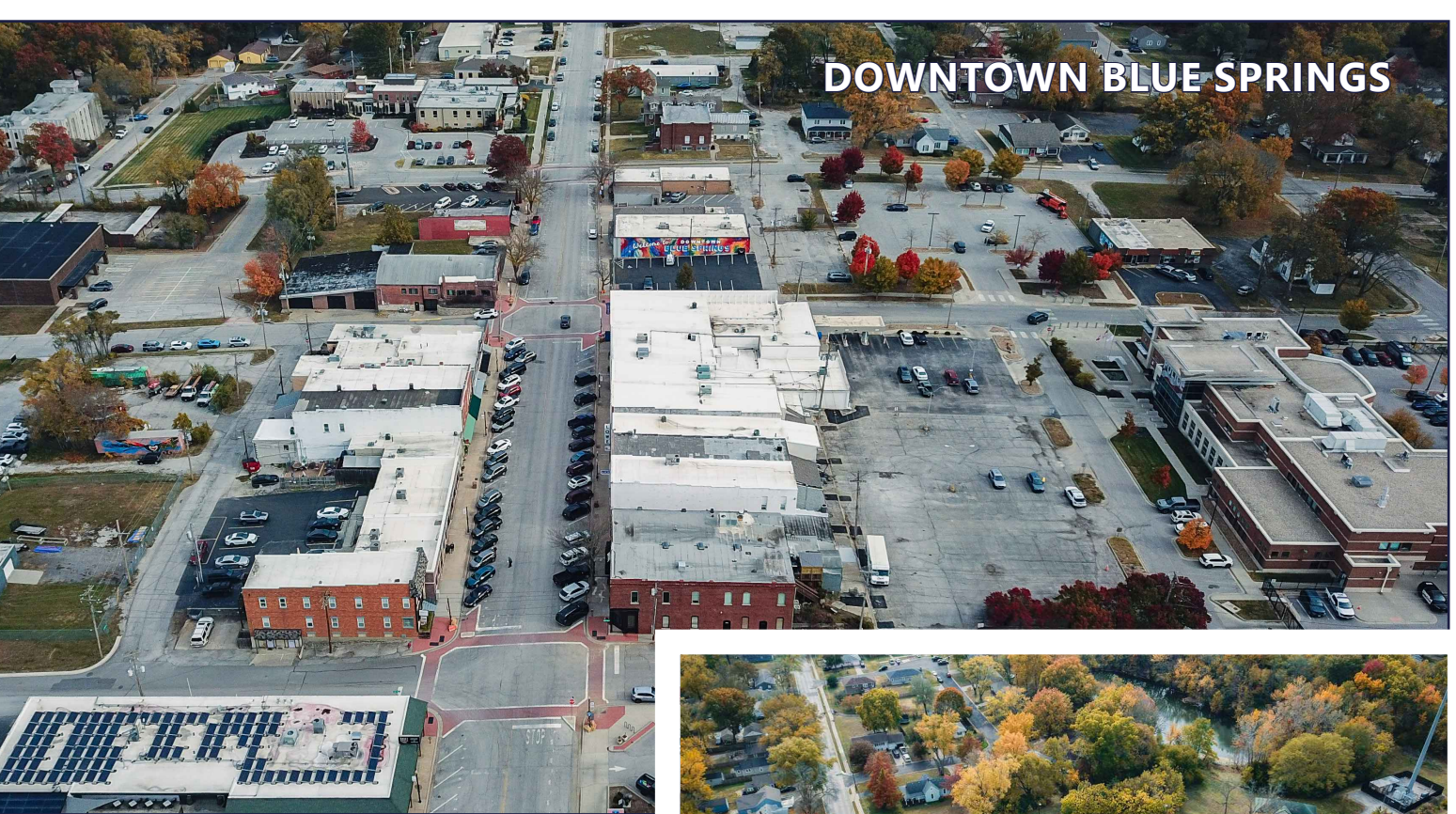
- Improve streetscape to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Develop Central Park to offer recreational gathering areas Downtown.
- Encourage and support higher density residential units to attract new residents to Downtown.
- Foster a business-friendly environment where a mix of commercial uses is incorporated throughout Downtown.
- Promote redevelopment of underutilized and incompatible properties to implement the City's Downtown Master Plan.
- Utilize grants, the Main Center Redevelopment Corporation Policy and other funding opportunities

to further incentivize different types of development.

The City's Downtown Revitalization effort is multifaceted, involving infrastructure projects, economic incentives and redevelopment initiatives that will transform and enhance the Downtown district. At the heart of the Revitalization efforts are the Downtown Streetscape Enhancements Project and the Central Park Improvements Project.

The Downtown Streetscape Enhancements project will transform Downtown Blue Springs' streetscapes and build a new foundation for Downtown's revitalization. Funds from the voter approved bonds will be used to construct a new Main Street with sidewalks that are more pedestrian friendly and streetlights and landscaping that will improve the scenery of Downtown Blue Springs. The Downtown Revitalization project will help to make Downtown a distinct and unique destination, attracting culture, commerce and





DOWNTOWN BLUE SPRINGS



CENTRAL PARK

community for the City.

The Central Park Improvements project presents a chance to bring a nature recreation area to the urban setting of Downtown. This is an unutilized park that has the potential to be a new, vibrant civic space for the Downtown area, enhancing the landscaping, pathways and seating to knit the park into Downtown's pedestrian network. Funding for this project is allocated through the Park Sales Tax and Community Development Block Grant Funds. Residents can expect to see the addition of a loop trail around the lake starting next year in Phase 1 of the project.

Alongside these two anchor projects are the Lumbeyard redevelopment and the development of the former First Baptist Church property.

The former Lumbeyard was purchased by the City in 2012 and then demolished in 2022. The

property was declared surplus in September 2024 with a Request for Proposal (RFP) posted to solicit redevelopment plans for the property. An RFP review team consisting of the Mayor, Council and Staff reviewed the proposals received, selecting Flaherty & Collins Properties as the developers for the project. This project will see the transformation of the vacant site into an active, mixed-use development with first floor commercial space and residential units above. This will provide Downtown Blue Springs with new commercial space to further attract new types of dining and retail.

The former First Baptist Church property was purchased by the City of Blue Springs in January 2025. The City issued an RFP in December 2025 for the site,

soliciting proposals for potential reuse/redevelopment ideas.

While the Strategic Plan and the newly adopted Downtown Master Plan are new guiding planning documents for the City, the City's Downtown Revitalization efforts are building off the work of a decades-long project to transform the Downtown area. The Priority 90s Plan, the 1991 Action Plan, the 1998 Out of the Blue and into the Future Strategic Plan, the 2006 Downtown Masterplan laid the groundwork for helping to build Downtown Blue Springs. The City is excited to see these transformative projects through to completion and looks forward to sharing more with residents over the upcoming months.

Department earns three MPRA award **Blue Springs Park**



The Blue Springs Parks & Recreation Department was recognized with three Showcase Awards from the Missouri Park and Recreation Association (MPRA), honoring excellence in facility design, programming and special events.

The Carson Ross Community Recreation Complex (CRCRC) was recognized for Facility Design & Construction, celebrating its innovation, inclusivity and sustainability. Designed through community input, the CRCRC combines

the Blue Springs Fieldhouse indoor recreation center (opened 2015) with Blue Surf Bay Waterpark (opened 2024), a dynamic indoor/outdoor aquatic facility that incorporates environmentally conscious design principles.

The Programming award recognized Adaptive Swim Lessons, launched in April 2025 through a partnership with Children With Opportunity. These sessions provide a safe, welcoming environment where children of all abilities can experience the joy of swimming. Families across

the Kansas City metro have responded with overwhelming enthusiasm, traveling to Blue Springs for inclusive recreation opportunities not found elsewhere in Jackson County.

The Special Events award honored Brew to Brew .5K and 26.2m Run/Walk, a creative, community-driven event launched in 2023. In partnership with Scout Coffee and East Forty Brewing, this lighthearted race blends fitness and fun. Participants tackle a grueling .5K followed by a 26.2-meter stroll, offering a playful twist during the same

s for excellence ks & Rec Honored

weekend as the Kansas City Marathon. East Forty hosts the start and finish line with craft beer, while Scout Coffee fuels racers during packet pickup.

"Our work has always been about finding new ways to bring people together," said Justin Stuart, Director of Blue Springs Parks & Recreation. "It takes creativity, trust and a shared belief in what recreation can do for a community. I'm proud of how our team continues to turn ideas into experiences that make Blue Springs a better place to live."



— PLAY NATURALLY —
BLUE SPRINGS
— PARKS & RECREATION —



ADAPTIVE SWIM PROGRAM



BREW
TO
BREW

They're back! Public can witness early lifecycle of bald eagles via livestream

Bald Eagle Camera Goes Live in Blue Springs...Again



In March 2025, the City of Blue Springs, in partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), Evergy, Capital Electric Line Builders, Axis Communications and Wild Souls Wildlife Rescue and Rehab, created a livestream feed for a pair of nesting bald eagles and their young.

While they didn't produce any eggs last season, our eagle friends are back in the nest and ready to give it another go. The livestream gives viewers a seldom-seen experience of a bald eagle's life cycle in real-time. The live feed is active and can be accessed via the QR code to the right:



Bald eagles have made an impressive comeback in North America after dwindling to only about 3,000 nesting pairs in the 1950s. Today, over 10,000 pairs nest in the United States annually, including about 200 in Missouri. This livestream



is a unique opportunity for the public to witness these elusive and important birds in their natural state.

Eagle nests are large, regularly reaching 13 feet deep and 8 feet across. Bald eagles typically mate for life, and a pair produces 1–3 eggs annually, though rarely do all three chicks reach maturity. Young bald eagles acquire adult plumage at about age 5 and can live for up to 30 years. Eagles eat a combination of wild prey and carrion.

Christopher Cain, Urban Wildlife Biologist for MDC, said that he hopes the heightened visibility from this live stream inspires people to be more intentional with their choices that affect wildlife. Preserving large, mature trees ensures eagles find strong places to build their nests. Disposing of fishing line prevents eaglets and adult eagles alike from getting tangled. Limiting pesticide use can keep poison from entering eagles’ systems through the rodents they hunt.

Bald eagles are a protected species in the United States. The specific location of this nest will not

be disclosed to ensure the safety of the pair and their young. Members of the public should not seek out the nest or bother the birds in any way.

With 2026 being the 250th birthday of the United States, Blue Springs will continue to highlight the eagles throughout the year. And look for other events and celebrations as we near this significant milestone in our country’s history.

To learn more about bald eagles in Missouri, scan the QR code below.



Inquiries about the bald eagles can be directed to eagles@bluespringsgov.com.

New Website; Updated Domain Name Coming Soon

Blue Springs is changing its website domain name to **www.bluespringsmo.gov**, effective April 1, 2026. In addition, the City will unveil a brand new website.

The new website will offer a cleaner, more efficient experience for users, making it easier to navigate and find relevant information. Features will include an AI search engine, a more robust City calendar, more vibrant images and colors, and landing pages for each City department.

The City's website serves as the primary digital communication platform for residents, businesses and visitors. Its purpose is to provide accurate and accessible information about City services, promote transparency in government operations and enhance community engagement.

The updated domain reflects the City's commitment to secure, modern and accessible digital services. All City email addresses also will change to the new @bluespringsmo.gov format.

Visitors using the previous website or email addresses will be automatically redirected for a period of time during the transition.

Transitioning from a .com to a .gov domain will have several impacts on current users:

- **Bookmarks/Links:** Users will need to update their bookmarks and any saved links to the new .gov domain. Any external websites linking to the City's site will need to update their links to ensure they point to the correct address.
- **User Experience:** Overall user experience should improve due to the enhanced security and credibility of the .gov domain.
- **Search Engine Results:** There might be a temporary fluctuation in search engine rankings as the new domain is indexed.
- **Communication/Support:** The City will post announcements on the website and social media and assist users with any questions or issues.

While there may be some initial adjustments for users, the long-

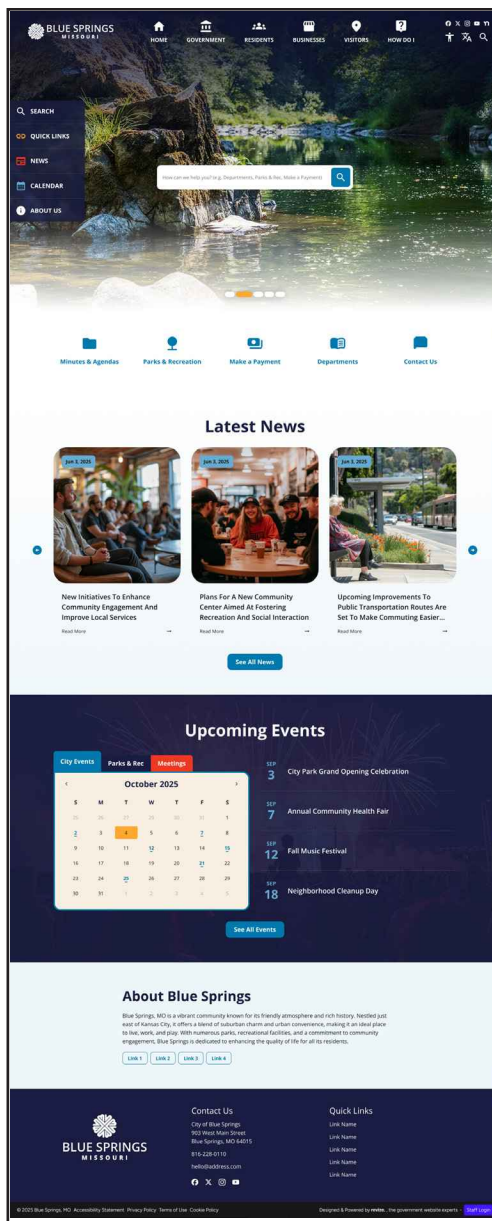
term benefits of increased security, trust and professionalism will enhance their experience with the City's online services.

Domains, specifically for government organizations, can offer several important advantages, primarily related to credibility, trust and clarity of purpose. Here are a few reasons why the City is making this switch:

- **Trust/Credibility:** A .gov domain is exclusively available to government entities, which unequivocally establishes that the website is a legitimate and authorized government agency.
- **Protection from Impersonation:** Government organizations are targets for impersonation and phishing attempts. By using a .gov domain, the City can reduce the risk of fraudulent websites attempting to impersonate official government sources.
- **Enhanced Public Service:** A .gov domain helps government organizations fulfill their primary mission of serving the public by providing a clear and trusted channel for accessing government services, information and resources.
- **Improved Visibility:** Search engines and online directories often prioritize .gov websites in search results, leading to better visibility and easier access for searching government-related information and services.
- **Compliance/Accessibility:** Government organizations are subject to various legal and regulatory requirements, such as accessibility standards, data privacy regulations and transparency mandates. Switching to a .gov domain demonstrates

our commitment to compliance.

- **Consistency/Professionalism:** Using a .gov domain aligns with the standard practice for government websites. This can improve overall user experience and make it easier for people to navigate and trust the site.
- **Access to Government Resources:** Many government organizations have access to specific resources, support and services designed for .gov websites, which can enhance functionality and security.



Did You Know, Blue Springs...?

Did you know that it has been more than 10 years since the iconic downtown Blue Springs water tower was removed?

In March of 2014, crews began dismantling the water tower near Southwest Smith and Southwest 11th streets. It was all part of a renovation and expansion project for the Howard L. Brown Public Safety Building, which was completed in 2015.

From an article in the March 11 issue of *The Examiner*, in November 2013, representatives from McClaren, Wilson & Lawrie, Inc. and Treanor Architects – the firms that designed the new Howard L. Brown Public Safety Building – said the downtown water tower no longer serves any function because it has “no pressure and storage capacity.”

The project forced portions of Southwest Smith Street and Southwest 11th Street to be closed a couple of days while the water tower was being removed. In addition, several Blue Springs Police services were disrupted and had to be moved to a temporary location at the Paul Consiglio Education Center. Other police department staff relocated to City Hall. City Council, Planning Commission and other public meetings were held at the Municipal Annex.

Former Blue Springs Mayor Carson Ross was quoted in *The Examiner* article saying, “Due to the expansion and renovation construction project, many city functions will be temporarily moved. This allows us to reduce the overall cost of the project and reduce the construction process.”

Also reported in the article, the Howard L. Brown Public Safety Building was converted into a three-level facility with 72,000 square feet of space. Additional parking lots were provided at the Smith and 11th Street intersection as well. Funding for this expansion and renovation project was made possible when Blue Springs voters passed a 1/2 cent sales tax increase dedicated to public safety in April 2011. Today, the public safety building features a more customer service-oriented design.

Easter Egg-Stravaganza

March 28

Wilbur Young Park



BLUE SPRINGS
MISSOURI