



**Left:** Starfish Missions partners with churches in the D.R. who do outreach with families in need. **Right:** Michael and Beth Searcy have made lifelong connections in the Dominican Republic, where they go annually after collecting donations. That money is then spent on children who need certain items to be able to attend school. Some of those kids they've helped are now community and church leaders, as well as professionals, like doctors and lawyers.



Photos courtesy of Starfish Missions

Starfish Missions began its first year, as a 501(c)(3) profit, helping about 25 kids buy what they needed to attend school. This last trip, the mission was able to help 600 kids meet requirements and attend school.



Michael Searcy poses with some of the children he and wife Beth have helped in the Dominican Republic. They started Starfish Missions, after receiving donations from friends and families, to help kids get what they needed to attend school.

# ACTIONS MAKING DIFFERENCES

## Starfish Missions, helping hundreds of school children in Dominican Republic

BY BOBBIE CURD  
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Back in 2004, it was an eye-opening experience for Crestwood couple Michael and Beth Searcy to go on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic (D.R.) with their former church. After returning in '06 and in '07, “we really started to pull things together ...” Michael says, eventually starting their own organization in 2008.

Now, the Searcys run Starfish Missions, 501©(3) nonprofit focused on raising contributions that support getting kids to school in the D.R. The mission was able most recently to get a whopping 600 kids geared up and able to attend school.

“Even in the public school system, the government doesn’t provide the requirement, so a lot of families can’t afford to send their kids to school — especially if they have multiple children,” Michael says.

During their first visit, Beth says she and Michael didn’t have some of the skillsets other participants had, so they focused on visiting schools. “We saw kids on the outskirts of the school property, waving. Leaders said they weren’t allowed to come in ...” she says.

The Searcys did not understand. “In the Dominican Republic, they are required to have a uniform and come with certain school supplies — which many cannot afford,” Beth says. And if you cannot afford them, you don’t go to school.

According to the Education Policy Center, the D.R. reports a gross enrollment rate of 102%, which most would see as high participation. But the data also showed that only 52% of students complete primary school.

“We also found that families with multiple children — they will take turns going, since they can only afford supplies for one child,” Michael says.



Photo courtesy of Starfish Missions

Starfish Missions is run by Michael and Beth (pictured) Searcy, of Crestwood, who take annual trips to the Dominican Republic to help outfit kids in uniforms and other school needs. If kids’ families can’t afford the requirements in the D.R., they aren’t allowed to attend school.

Beth says studies find these children who don’t complete school are more likely to turn to drugs and prostitution to make ends meet. “That weighed heavily on us ...” she says.

The couple had three young children at the time, and couldn’t get those facts out of their minds.

“We thought what if we raised some money — first it was through friends and families, we worked with the church we went to, made contacts for several kids who we could help to go to school,” Beth says, and from there it grew.

The first year, they helped 25 children attend school. “We went down at the end of July, physically took these kids to the store to buy uniforms and shoes,” she says. Eighteen years later, they still go down for anywhere from a week to 10 days every year.

“This year, we took 600 kids shopping,” Beth says, with help from other contacts there, of course.

Starfish Missions partners with churches in the D.R. who do outreach with families in need. It was important to them to break the cycle, and buying school needs locally also impacts the communities financially.

“Now that we’ve been doing this for so long, a lot of these kids have grown up in our program. Some who we were helping are now 18, 19 or 20 years old, even older, and have gradu-

ated high school — and a lot of them have gone on to college,” Michael says. “Some have become lawyers. One of the kids now — he’s a full-fledged doctor, owns his own practice ... We see others who became leaders in the church and community.”

That doctor has become one of the mission’s key partners now, Beth says, and puts the word out to area churches when the Searcys are headed there.

She says Starfish Missions is now focused on campaigning and amping up fundraisers. “We’ve really done it by word of mouth ... And people can donate through our website.” She says a big reason why the mission has grown is due to the personal connection.

“Most of the donors know us, and they know who we are and where their money is going,” Beth says.

Starfish Missions aims to be completely transparent with funding — including the totals raised and exactly where the funds go, the couple says. The mission provides information, including an annual report as well as a graph detailing how many kids are being helped.

“We committed early on, when we set this up — every single dollar goes directly to the kids. We cover our airline tickets when we go,” Beth says.

To give others an idea, to buy everything a child needs to attend school usually costs about \$65 per student. She says, “For anyone who goes shopping here, you can barely get a pair of shoes for that cost ...”

The mission doesn’t ask for commitments from donors — it’s a “give what you can” situation, they say. “But we feel very blessed, because at any time they could steer their donations elsewhere ...” Michael says. He says the annual goal at first was only “not to go backwards — it would really be hard to go down and say we can’t help as many as we did last year ...”

If you had asked them 15 years ago, Beth says she would have guessed they’d be able to help at least 50 kids a year by now. “It’s hard to even fathom that we’ve helped 600 — it’s a God thing, a passion project.”

To find out more, visit starfishmissions.org.



Photo courtesy of Oldham County History Center  
**RICHARD AND RUTH ANN BEARD**

## Beards named as 2025 J.C. Barnett Champions of History

BY STAFF REPORT

Ruth Ann and Richard Beard, recently announced as the 2025 J.C. Barnett Champions of Oldham County History award recipients, have been big supporters of the Oldham County History Center. It is no wonder since their family roots are deeply embedded in the county. Ruth Ann was born at the Pewee Valley Hospital. She grew up in Crestwood, often helping with the Minish and Potts Florists owned by her aunt and uncle.

Richard was born at home and grew up on farms outside of La Grange. Richard and his brother took care of the family dairy as teenagers, working the dairy cows both morning and night.

The couple met at Oldham County High School where they began their lifelong love and friendship.

The Beards are avid church goers and have volunteered in numerous programs both through church and local clubs over the years. For several decades Ruth Ann was the piano player for the Crestwood Methodist Church, presiding over weekly services, funerals and weddings.

Today, Ruth spends a lot of time with her mother, who is over 100 years old. Ruth is in the bell choir at church and is with a volunteer group that provides dinner for a recovery group in Portland.

Richard was a volunteer firefighter for the Crestwood Fire Department and member of the Crestwood Lions Club. Today, Richard volunteers for the

Lighthouse Academy, a service project of the Crestwood Methodist Church. The Lighthouse Academy, located off Newburg Road, provides school and enrichment programs for over 100 neighborhood kids.

From 1988 to 2013 Ruth Ann and Richard owned Beard’s Outdoor Power Equipment in Crestwood before selling it to Anderson Sales and Service. Ruth Ann and Richard have three daughters and seven grandchildren. The Beards have demonstrated a life of service in their community and church with multiple volunteer projects over their lifetime. As Richard said, “My motto is service to humanity is the best work of life.”

The Beards will be honored at the 2025 Oldham County History Center annual gala which will be held on Tuesday, July 29 at Barn8 Restaurant and Event Center at Hermitage Farm. The event is open to the public but reservations are required.

Sponsorships are available to support the event. Sponsors help to pay for the amenities of the venue and food. Sponsors will get special recognition for their support of the history center the Champions of Oldham County History.

Tickets are on sale now. If you would like to receive more information about sponsoring the event or a written invitation, contact the Oldham County History Center at 502-222-0826, by email at info@oldhamkyhistory.com or visit www.oldhamcountyhistorycenter.com.

## COUNCIL

FROM PAGE A1

Councilor Jason Taylor, who was credited with drafting the moratorium, said that he received a copy of the Fiscal Court’s submitted moratorium and made minor edits to ensure the language applied to the city rather than the unincorporated county jurisdiction.

There was some confusion regarding if the April 30 special meeting would act as a first reading, following the normal city ordinance-enacting process of having two readings — the latter with a public hearing. Concerns then arose as to the process being too slow.

Taylor said that when he provided City Attorney Beach Craigmyle

with the ordinance, he had titled it “Ordinance 3-2025” with the intention of having a special reading, but “Mr. Craigmyle changed it to ‘proposed ordinance.’”

“The procedure says to do it ... [by] sending it to the Planning Commission, getting them to rule on it and then we can pass an ordinance with an intelligent, factual-based decision on data centers,” Craigmyle responded. “What would you do if the Planning Commission comes back and says, ‘We think your moratorium is overreaching’ ... It’s the cart before the horse ...”

“If you’re in a hurry to get this moratorium passed, we can call a special meeting a day before we have the second reading.”

The council soon after

unanimously approved a motion to schedule a special meeting for 6 p.m. on May 29, two days after the May 27 Planning Commission meeting where both the council and the court’s requests for moratoriums will be heard. The council could, then, have a second reading on June 2 during their regularly-scheduled meeting and vote to enact the moratorium.

Sarah Little, one of the three citizens who spoke during public comment, voiced concerns about the lack of a definition of data centers, saying, “any moratorium that is put forward, without a definition [in place], opens itself up to being pushed right back.”

“There’s not going to be a definition by this body tonight on a data center,” said Mayor John

Black. “We don’t know enough about what a data center is to create a definition ... so that’s the reason the Study Review Committee has gone to work with six Planning Commission members to begin discussing, through research and due diligence, what in the world a data center is ...”

After public comment, the council unanimously approved a motion to send the 150-day moratorium on the “acceptance, processing and approval of applications for the development or expansion of data centers of any size, all private utilities, all private utility buildings and all data storage facilities within the jurisdiction of the City of La Grange” forward to the Planning Commission for review.

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