



# Here's to Your Health

## Businessman Helps Accelerate Town's Comeback

By Symone Salisbury

**W**hich is most effective in curing ailments: professional medical treatment or home remedies?

John Earnest, president of AmbuCare, has practiced both methods to help citizens in a physical sense and, on a broader scale, the Marion community recover from a recession that impacted the city in recent years. Especially challenging has been the rebuilding of its manufacturing industry.

Earnest co-established AmbuCare, the state's first walk-in urgent care facility, in 1980. It remains the only one located in Grant County. The facility provides numerous services for local businesses and residents, including general medical care, treatment of minor emergencies and occupational health care.

AmbuCare serves both business and residential customers.

Many businesses team with AmbuCare to conduct, among other initiatives, employee drug screenings, flu shots and annual/biannual exams.

Earnest's dedication isn't limited to physical well-being. One could argue that his greatest defenses against economic setbacks are the "home remedies" he employs – resources, people and community strengths of Marion, a city he has considered home for most of his life.

He served as chairman of the Grant County Republican Party and has led the Indiana Wesleyan University Citizen's Advisory Council for nearly 20 years as chairman.

### Occupational hazards

Until Marion's economic downturn in the early 2000s, approximately 40% of AmbuCare's business revolved around emergency medical care.

"We serviced people like the Thompson plant," Earnest recalls. "Plants like that are no longer here. That's when we got out of the urgent care business (as a main focus). We have physicians on staff now who



can admit patients to the hospital. That's kind of how we tried to supplement what we lost into some new areas."

Occupational health care still constitutes a primary portion of AmbuCare's clientele.

"Would any urgent care facility make it in this community?" he considers. "No. I think by being home-grown, home-operated by people in beautiful downtown Marion, Indiana and Grant County makes it a lot easier for us to operate."

### Sealed with a handshake

AmbuCare individualizes business offerings based on customer needs.

According to Earnest, clients encompass everything from "mom and pop shops to larger groups."

One example is Dollar General, which recently built a \$1 million distribution center in Marion along the Interstate 69 corridor.

"For us to meet with clients we already know, we have a presence," he states. "We have a reputation. And we don't have a cookie-cutter, 'this is what you do' (philosophy). We'll try to tailor what we do to what you need.

"But if we do a good job, we think we'll get some more (business)," he adds. "We have no contracts. We never have had them. We want you to come back."

Employers also can participate in AmbuCare's safety and health programs, such as stress reduction, First Aid in the Workplace and CPR.

### Road to recovery

In 1991, Earnest formed Able Ambulance, which provides transportation services to mentally and physically handicapped, aged and infirmed individuals.

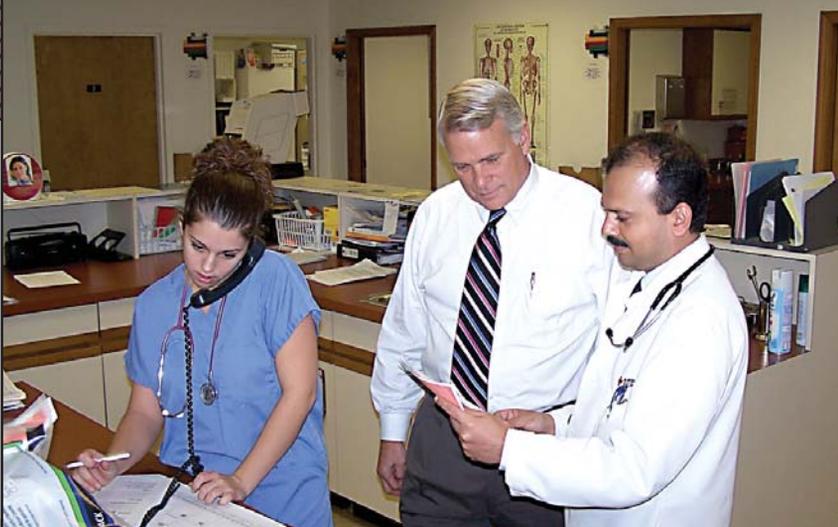
Rounding out the trio of health care organizations founded by Earnest is Ambulatory Care Solutions, LLC. Created in 2004, it links veterans in South Bend, Terre Haute and Bloomington to health care clinics.

"We provide primary health care to 8,000 veterans in the South Bend area," he shares. "We maintain any primary care needs they have and it's particularly attractive to veterans because they can get their medications at a pretty reduced rate through the Veterans Administration."

The program excludes Marion because the city already has a community-based outpatient clinic.

### Sidelining complacency

As chairman of Indiana Wesleyan University Citizen's Advisory Council, Earnest leads fellow members in discussing university/community partnerships. Among the topics are university programs, the status of campus development and improving communication with the community.



John Earnest maintains a hands-on role in company and community issues.

When the council listed community recommendations, Earnest discovered that some projects were already underway; the problem was a lack of awareness.

"In many cases they were doing them," he points out, "but the community didn't know about it, which goes back to the biggest problem with a lot of things like that is that they don't tell their story. So I think there was an impact."

Earnest contends that growing up in Marion presents invaluable advantages in his efforts to help shape the town's future.

"I was heavily involved in politics for 20 years, so I was able to meet a lot of people, which opens the doors so you know who to talk to," he continues. "It was a lot easier to be – for lack of a better term – a big fish in a small community, especially one you grew up with.

"The only way a community will develop is by people becoming involved in activities," he maintains. "Not only do we have a service that has come back from some of the problems we've had over the last six or eight years, but in order for the service to be successful or our community to be successful, people need to be involved in what's going on."

#### INFORMATION LINK

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