



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 1, 2026

State of Greene County 2026 address



SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Greene County Presiding Commissioner, Bob Dixon, gave his annual State of the County address at Good Morning Springfield at CoxHealth’s Meyer Fitness Center on Oct. 1, hosted by the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce. The following is the speech transcript:

Thank you, Matt — and good morning, Springfield!

It's my pleasure to once again stand before you and report on the state of our county as we honor yesterday, focus on serving today and look to the future to build a better tomorrow.

We are a vast community, comprised of 9 cities, 20-plus unincorporated communities, 12 fire districts, and 11 school districts. As I consider them all, I'm pleased to share with you that 2026 has been another positive year — one of growth, development and increased productivity.

Despite our many challenges, we are moving forward daily with eyes that look to the future and feet planted firmly in a long tradition of dedicated service to all citizens by each of our elected officials, judges, and employees.

Our venue today is quite fitting. A rich heritage of serving others is aptly illustrated by where we sit.

Ken and Jane Meyer exemplified the entrepreneurial spirit of the Ozarks and the unique way this community takes care of its own and looks to the future. While they were a mighty team, it was Jane who was first known as the gentle giant. Her dedication to seeing others have every opportunity for good health led her and Ken to help fund this outstanding center.

After meeting Jane in the mid-'80s, I later learned that years earlier she had discreetly kept a struggling family afloat during a very difficult time. As fate would have it, years later that businessman with a clothing store on the Plaza — rich in wisdom and discernment — would be a mentor to me for a number of years. He went to his reward this summer at the age of 97.

Today we do honor yesterday and these great examples so that we are mindful to also pay it forward as we look to the future and prepare our community for those we may never even meet.

Throughout 2026, Greene County has collaborated with the City of Springfield to celebrate two important milestones: the Centennial celebration of Route 66 and 250 years of American independence.

We are grateful to our citizen-led America250 committee chaired by Howard Fisk and staffed by our amazing archivist Connie Yen and her team at Greene County Archives for a series of outstanding events throughout the year.

The pinnacle was the commemoration of the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8 by former Gov. Jay Nixon, a direct descendant of the first reader in 1776, Philadelphia sheriff Colonel John Nixon.

It was a soul-stirring, bipartisan day as former Gov. John Ashcroft and former Greene County Judge Max Bacon led nearly 500 Greene Countians, spread over three floors in the rotunda, in the national anthem.

As we honored yesterday, our hearts swelled in gratitude and honor for those who sacrificed so much that we — people they would never even meet — might be able to be free and govern ourselves.

Seated near the front that day — just behind our independent judiciary, spanning the circuit, appellate and Supreme Courts — was a lady who had fled Soviet-imposed communism with her late husband, who had been a close associate of Lech Walesa in the Polish Solidarity movement of the late '70s and early '80s.

Zbigniew and Anna Jedrzejewski arrived in Springfield on Veterans Day in 1982 carrying a one-way passport. They were just glad to be alive and to be free. Anna later worked at the Greene County Sheriff's Office, and Zbigniew was posthumously awarded the Polish Cross of Freedom and Solidarity by the President of Poland in 2017.

She was delighted to celebrate 250 years of freedom in a country that welcomed them with open arms. She said, "America is my old adopted mother who gave me her hand and gave me her arms!"

They were immigrants yearning to be free that the founders would never meet. Today we honor them and all who have valiantly defended freedom. I'm pleased to have Anna here as my guest today. Would you please honor her and the memory of her husband as she stands?

We honor yesterday, focus on serving today and look to the future to build a better tomorrow.

Serving today is best exemplified by the spirit of our customer-service-minded employees who seek constant quality improvement.

In January, the Greene County Leadership Academy Class VIII began its six-month program, bringing together employees from across county offices to deepen their understanding of budgeting, operations, and day-to-day functions while learning even more about Great Game of Government principles like financial literacy and open-book management and developing an even deeper commitment to public service.

This class organized a countywide supply drive on their own time benefiting Rescue One, collecting and delivering two large truckloads of supplies to support animals in need.

Then they partnered with Springfield Skilled Care Center, spending time with more than 100 residents through activities, conversation, pampering stations and fellowship — their compassion was above and beyond anything we expected.

We're grateful for a team that believes in you.

Outstanding service was also recognized this year when Judge Kirsten Poppen was honored with the 2026 Women's Justice Award for Public Service by Missouri Lawyers Media for her work as Greene County's civic education coordinator, a role in which she collaborates with fellow judges to present on the workings of the judicial system to local civic groups and schools.

As citizens, we are fortunate in Greene County to have officeholders and judges who all work together as professionals for the people.

We have worked closely with our partners in the courts to maximize the funding provided by taxpayers in the 2017 public safety measure. They also stepped up with court funds designated

for safety and security to help complete the project after costs rose due to inflation. They'll be moving in a couple of weeks.

Yesterday, actually, juvenile staff began moving into what used to be the "old jail" — on a recent tour, even we could barely recognize it as such.

The space now includes a new secure lobby, and what used to be the old lobby of the jail has been repurposed as a beautiful seating area, surrounded by a secure stairwell for staff, along with trauma-sensitive rooms for families and children.

And finally, what used to be an old jail pod — complete with the same skylight — has been repurposed as a spacious, trauma-informed juvenile courtroom drawn from the latest nationally recognized best practices, where staff and support organizations and partners literally and symbolically surround those being served.

Please plan to join us November 9th for a dedication and open house.

While remaining in the current location, Circuit Clerk Bryan Feemster and his team continued modernizing court operations this year — transitioning from legacy case processing tools for civil cases, garnishments, transcript requests and probate cases — and developed a digital training library to support the transition and improve consistency across court operations.

Despite state staffing reductions, coupled with increased case filings, the office has improved efficiency and accessibility.

Speaking of accessibility, when it comes to elections in Greene County, blind and visually impaired citizens will be even better served thanks to County Clerk Shane Schoeller's partnership with Mary's Braille International and NaviLens.

By scanning a large, color-coded display, similar to a QR code, the popular app will read aloud all of the related information for the citizen, ensuring that voting or other activities are more easily accomplished as intended.

But with Election Day just over a month away, we still need election judges in 12 polling places, and the good news is you don't have to live there. The training is excellent and we will pay you a good stipend, plus you can take part in guaranteeing elections are free and fair. If you're interested, please see the county clerk or call the courthouse.

We congratulate Sheriff Jim Arnott on being sworn in as the U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Missouri on August 28th, and we welcome our new Interim Sheriff Jason Johnson.

In recognizing his team for their outstanding service, he's singled out Captain Chad Strain as an example for his willingness and ability to take on all manner of projects, from managing people and operating the SWAT team to providing and implementing technical and mechanical solutions to all the problems and needs of the GCSO. He operates as a deputy, an engineer, a fabricator, a mechanic, and a technology expert. We are grateful for all of the Chad Strains who faithfully show up every day and enthusiastically serve you.

The jail has expanded its behavioral health services partnership this year, enabling a full-time, on-site behavioral health liaison to help accelerate referrals, connect individuals with appropriate services and support those preparing for reentry. Recent opioid lawsuit settlement funds have also helped expand access to psychiatric care, including weekly consultations, telehealth evaluations and collaborative treatment planning.

Assessor Brent Johnson's team has had some remarkable achievements this year in regard to modernization and infrastructure improvements. An improved customer service area has doubled available service windows from four to eight, significantly cutting wait times.

They also completed a major software transition in coordination with the Collector's Office, establishing a seamless, unified system between offices and eliminating historical software compatibility issues.

It has consolidated key administrative functions, speeding up processing times and providing a much more efficient customer experience.

Treasurer Justin Hill asserts his world is not as exciting to talk about in a speech. Oh, but it is. He says there is not really a story to tell, but perhaps a casual mention in a longer list of successes... The bank conversion carried out earlier this year after a competitive bid was a major event. It was smooth, well planned, and offices worked together and coordinated well, with no disruption to county services.

In his words, because it was managed responsibly, there is no story to tell. But had it not been... there would already be a story that everyone would've heard long before this speech. We are grateful for those who show up every day, work together and pay attention to details that make a big difference.

And I can assure you...nothing incorrect is going to get past our County Auditor Cindy Stein, who we affectionately refer to as the Dean of the Courthouse.

We're thankful for the good working relationship with our partners at the City of Springfield — City Manager David Cameron, Mayor Jeff Schrag and his colleagues on the council. New leadership often brings a fresh approach to collaboration and solution finding. This is especially evident in our partnership known as the Springfield-Greene County Park Board.

Director Ron Schneider has revolutionized the focus on asset management and dedicating resources to deferred maintenance, a greater focus on core services, park safety and placemaking. Key projects and initiatives include McDaniel Park development, the Meador Park pickleball complex, Lafayette Park master plan improvements and planning initiatives for several parks and trails. We're excited to see what's in store for our parks and our libraries.

We honor yesterday, focus on serving today and look to the future to build a better tomorrow. As we look to the future, we are constantly mindful of our youth, some of whom may be tomorrow's leaders and some of whom we may never meet.

I'm thankful for my colleagues on the commission, Rusty MacLachlan and John Russell, and how they serve focused in this way. Rusty recently began serving on the Facility Master Plan

Advisory Council for Springfield Public Schools, and John is participating in discussions on how to expand the MU School of Medicine's Springfield campus. Both have been excited to participate in the SPS Principal for a Day program as well.

These investments of time are outside of our standard responsibilities but underscore the belief and confidence we have in those coming after us.

This commitment to our youth and their quality of life is also evident in how federal American Rescue Plan funds were prioritized.

Among several, three completed projects in particular are already creating a lasting impact as we look to the future.

We partnered with Burrell/Centerstone and provided \$5.325 million toward the 27,858-square-foot Youth Resiliency Campus, a behavioral health facility providing teenagers with a comprehensive continuum of mental health and crisis intervention services.

They've already served 100 clients, helping them to find wellness there or with other referral partners after presenting with thoughts of suicide or self-harm, misuse of medication or other mental health concerns.

A staff member told us, "We had a patient come in who was combative and in distress. By the end of their stay, they were smiling and relaxed due to the care and concern our team showed them. We were able to provide a safe space where they felt heard and seen while also getting them connected to the services they desperately required."

And another mother expressed, "You guys are doing a beautiful thing here," after tearfully opening up about her own challenges and struggling to provide care for her two girls.

The Good Samaritan Boys Ranch Resource Center received \$352,928, providing warehouse and office space where youth aging out of foster care can access furniture and household goods, life skills training and relational support.

And the Springfield-Greene County Library's new Republic Branch received \$500,000 earmarked for the new Business Connect Center, creating a dedicated space for entrepreneurs and remote workers. The center features collaborative technology, virtual meeting capabilities, a laser engraver, broadband internet, computers, Wi-Fi, workspaces and business resources.

Another youth-focused investment in tomorrow is our award-winning, nationally acclaimed Juvenile Office.

In addition to their move to a new space, they're also reimagining their programming as they plan for the future, with a focus on mental health services for youth and their families before, during and after they come into the care of the juvenile court.

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department launched Family Connects for the same reason — an investment in many tomorrows.

In partnership with CoxHealth and Mercy, Family Connects provides a nurse home visit for all families in Greene County with a newborn at no cost to the family.

These nurses play an important role in supporting the mental health and well-being of new parents, creating a safe space for parents to talk openly about challenges or additional support that may be needed.

Completing over 1,700 home visits since being launched, nurses have made over 3,100 referrals to 18 community partner resources and 554 referrals around parent well-being and emotional support. Stronger families mean stronger futures.

We cannot mention health care investments in the future without thanking our host, CoxHealth.

There are moments in a community's history when a single decision changes the trajectory. We are living through one of those moments.

For decades, families in Southwest Missouri have faced a difficult reality: when a child needed specialized care, they often had to leave home to get it.

Today, more than 30% of children requiring specialty pediatric services must travel outside our region for treatment, and many families face barriers that make that journey difficult, including transportation challenges, time away from work, and financial strain.

So the partnership between CoxHealth and St. Louis Children's Hospital is very significant for Greene County and our entire region.

This brings nationally recognized pediatric specialists from WashU Medicine and St. Louis Children's Hospital directly to Springfield, allowing more children to receive world-class care close to home.

Families can spend more time just helping their children heal. The impact is already being felt. In March, St. Louis Children's at CoxHealth opened within the walls of Cox South.

Since opening, more children are staying in Springfield for their hospital care. Tomorrow's beam-raising ceremony represents another major milestone for the future of our community. Remember to make your mark on the beam before leaving today.

We are fortunate to have two vibrant health providers. I must also mention that Children's Mercy with Mercy strengthens pediatric care across Southwest Missouri.

The O'Reilly Pediatric Center puts key services in one location and brings expert pediatric care close to home. It opens in December.

Finally, and full circle — in the spirit of Ken and Jane Meyer — we work hard in this county to bring others along and leave no one behind. At Greene County, we're proud of our longstanding funding of and affiliation with Abilities First and the vital services, resources and encouragement they provide our citizens with disabilities — or what we prefer to call unique abilities — so they too can learn, play, build independence and participate fully in their community.

Those investments are showing up in parks, health care settings, schools, libraries and programs across the county — creating places where all children can belong. Abilities First has caused accessibility to be considered from the beginning rather than added later.

Their investments also support young people as they prepare for adulthood — in areas ranging from kitchen safety to road readiness for new drivers to employment.

Programming like this matters as we look to the future for all citizens.

Next time you go through the Springfield-Branson National Airport — until Christmas — check out the new art exhibit, “The Life I Choose,” presented by Abilities First, Friends of Abilities First and local legend Randy Bacon. It grew from one mother’s desire to make sure people knew her son for his life, not simply for his diagnosis. That is something worth thinking about and celebrating as we look to the future.

It’s a tremendous honor to serve you and report to you as stakeholders on just a few of the many accomplishments made on your behalf as we look to the future. For a more complete report, please take the postcard on your table with you as you leave, scan the QR code and share it with an associate.

As I wrap up this morning, I renew today the pledge I made 8 years ago to you — and to the employed and elected public servants of Greene County. I didn’t run this past my commission colleagues before stepping up here this morning, but I know I can speak for them as well because this is how they conduct themselves every day.

The first letter of each statement spells TRUST, the essential bedrock and cornerstone of all we do.

I hereby promise and pledge to:

Truly adhere to the letter and spirit of the law,

Respect the citizens as originators, beneficiaries, and guardians of their own county government,

Understand and honor the independence, responsibilities, and limitations of each officeholder,

Serve the people loyally and hold dear the responsibility and trust given by the citizens, and

Treat all individuals with dignity and respect, regardless of political party, prior opinion, or personality.

As always, please let us know if we can be of service to you personally. It is our honor to serve you and to look to the future with you in mind. And with that, let’s make it another good morning, Springfield!

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Greene County is the State of Missouri's fourth most populous county, serving approximately 308,000 people. Its mission is to provide all citizens of Greene County, including those in its cities, a safe and thriving community through excellent customer service, unparalleled dedication, and the efficient use of taxpayer dollars. The Greene County Commission is the executive body of Greene County operating under guidelines established in the Revised Statutes of the State of Missouri. Within that authority the Commission enacts ordinances, resolutions and policies, supervises the activities of county departments, fixes salaries, adopts the annual budget, provides for construction and other services, and conducts hearings on planning and zoning matters.

For additional information contact the Greene County Commission's Public Information Office at 417-844-4311 or pio@greenecountymo.gov.