



# ASU project measures local quality of life

By KENNETH L. STEWART and CASEY JONES Special to the Standard-Times

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The Community Development Initiative at Angelo State University has analyzed a series of measurements comparing the quality of life in San Angelo to the rest of Texas. Today's article, the first of four, explains what The San Angelo Social Health Index is.

Just as daily numbers on the stock markets give us a sense of where the economy is going, data can provide insight into the direction of a community.

Providing such perspective on San Angelo is the goal of the Community Development Initiatives (CDI) program established this year at Angelo State University. CDI has initiated an innovative index that uses statistical data between 2000 and 2007 to measure the quality of life in San Angelo and Tom Green County. The result is The San Angelo Social Health Index, which will get annual updates as new facts become available.

The index bases results upon a set of standards used nationally and allows us to compare the quality of San Angelo life. Scoring is based on a 100-point system; the higher the score, the better our community health. Annual scores move up or down based on year-to-year changes, but also on comparisons built into the index to gauge the local quality of life against the rest of the state of Texas.

The new index combines 18 indicators, divided into three categories, to score the local quality of life.

\* The first group - what we call the Dependent Populations Index - considers six measurements affecting children, the elderly and disabled persons. This index examines the infant mortality rate, the percent of economically disadvantaged students in schools, the child abuse rate, the school dropout rate, the rate of poverty among elders and the rate of abuse of elders and disabled persons.

\* We call our second category the Households Index. It incorporates six metrics: the suicide rate, the rate of drug violation arrests, the ratio of college costs to wages, the divorce rate, the rate of food stamp use and the ratio of housing cost to household incomes.

\* Our final category is the Community Index, which evaluates the per capita cost of uncompensated

health care, the unemployment rate, the annual percentage change of wages, the annual percent change in jobs, the violent crime rate and the ratio of wage inequality across sectors of the economy.

When we analyze these indices collectively, they provide an indication or score of the social health of our community. The change from year to year indicates how we as a community are progressing in the social arena.

The overall results of The San Angelo Social Health Index show the local quality of life fluctuating from a high of 64 on the 100-point scale in 2002 to a low of 43 in 2005.

Most recently in 2007, San Angelo showed a score of 52, about halfway between our worst possible outcome on the combined indicators and best possibilities. Our glass, in other words, is about half full.

San Angelo marked some improvement for the first three years of this new century in our study as the index score moved up from 61 in 2000 to its high point in 2002. Beginning in 2003, the local quality of life began to slide into a sort of "social recession," with the index score dropping to its low point in 2005. Since then, the community has climbed back to an improved score of 50 for 2007.

So what can the San Angelo index tell us? Like the stock market numbers, it gives us a snapshot of where the community stands in addressing some of our recurring social problems. Second, it provides a road map to help us decide which areas need our attention. Finally, once we have determined our social priorities, the index can give insight to how successful we are in handling them.

In a series of three additional Standard-Times articles, we will address some details on various aspects of the social health index as a window into the social challenges and accomplishments of the community. Our goals are simply to show where San Angelo stands on important social issues, to initiate discussion about those issues and to prompt action to make San Angelo a better place for ourselves and, most of all, for the community we leave for the future.

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### **The Community Development series**

\* Today: Social Health.

\* Monday, Jan. 19: A reputation on the line.

\* Monday, Jan. 26: Stretched - households and economic pressures.

\* Monday, Feb. 2 - Hopeful signs for our quality of life.



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