

“The battlefield of economic development is young, talented people.”

—D.C. Reeves,
Mayor-Elect of Pensacola

LEADERSHIP EXCHANGE
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LESSON 1: INVESTMENT FOLLOWS TALENT

“The battlefield of economic development now, in my belief, is not just the shovel-ready land or the site selection. The battlefield of economic development is young, talented people living there.”

—D.C. Reeves, Mayor-Elect of Pensacola

Summary:

- “Burning platform” is a common management term used to explain the necessity of change. Pensacola’s revitalization was sparked by two burning platforms. The first was recovery from Hurricane Ivan in 2004. The second was and still is keeping young talent from leaving.
- Both Mayor-Elect D.C. Reeves and philanthropist Quint Studer shared with us how talent retention is the animating purpose driving their work to build a more vibrant Pensacola.
- “Sometimes we got criticized for focusing so much on our downtown,” Studer said. “That wasn’t the goal. That was a tactic. The goal was to keep young talent home.”

Reflections from attendees:

- The importance of engaging young talent was the cohesive thread that ran throughout the trip.
- What is Acadiana’s burning platform? Net migration data and a recent “Power Poll” by The Acadiana Advocate point to the importance of attracting and retaining young talent.

Next steps:

- A couple of our Leadership Exchange attendees are attending a national “Young, Smart, and Local” conference on this topic.



LESSON 2: TALENT FOLLOWS PLACE

“We are continuing to narrate why it matters to have a walkable, bikable community; why it matters to have a tree canopy – because it's never been tied directly to economic development.”
—D.C. Reeves

Summary:

- With half of white-collar jobs still being remote and young people choosing where they live before choosing where they work, Mayor-Elect D.C. Reeves said, “We have to change the way we look at what our investments are and what attracts young people to move to a place.”
- Community Maritime Park and Palafox Street (one of the “Ten Great Streets in America”) are great examples of investments paying off for Pensacola.

Reflections from attendees:

- Investments in Downtown Lafayette and the Bicycle Lafayette Plan are great examples of quality of life improvements to attract young people to our region.
- How do we ensure quality of life investments are equitable for *everyone*?



LESSON 3: DOUBLE DOWN ON DOWNTOWN

Summary:

- The heart of Pensacola’s revitalization and what makes Pensacola a vibrant place is its downtown. It is a symbol of the community’s economic health and a magnet for attracting and retaining talent.
- Through a walking tour of downtown Pensacola, we learned about catalyst projects like Community Maritime Park and Bodacious Shops. We also learned about exciting new developments like the East Garden District.
- A key to Pensacola’s strategy has been careful curation of what businesses should go where. This intentionality has helped cultivate vibrancy and avoid cannibalization of existing businesses.

Reflections from attendees:

- At a post-trip debrief, attendees emphasized the importance of downtown housing and better connecting UL with Downtown Lafayette.
- The question was posed: “What is one big thing we could focus on together as a result of this trip?” Is it the connection between UL Lafayette and Downtown Lafayette?
- One of our presenters, Andrew Rothfeder, said of the two-block connection between UL and Downtown along Johnston Street: “what a cool, small problem to solve.”

LESSON 4: GET WEALTH OFF THE SIDELINES

“You want to get the right people elected and support them, but private dollars should lead the way.” —Quint Studer



Summary:

- Quint Studer is a testament to the power of private sector leadership and philanthropy in driving community revitalization. A phrase he often repeats in advising other communities is “get wealth off the sidelines.”
- Tactically speaking, Quint said: “Cities that thrive normally have private people that buy the property. Even if they don’t develop it, they don’t let it get developed wrong. The wrong building even in the right place doesn’t work, and the right building in the wrong place doesn’t work. It’s all about placement. You have to be smart about it.”
- The East Garden District is a new development led by Catalyst HRE to reactivate a section of downtown Pensacola, anchored by a new full-service hotel. Spearheaded by the private sector, the project is leveraging \$1.3 million in public infrastructure improvements through a public-private partnership with the city.

Reflections from attendees:

- Private investment (paired with public sector assistance) spurred downtown development in Pensacola. They didn’t wait on the government to lead.
- Let’s celebrate the people investing in our community! We have and need many “Quints.”

LESSON 5: GROW VIBRANT SMALL BUSINESSES

“Communities need to create the kind of environment that (1) ignites the spirit of entrepreneurship and (2) keeps small businesses alive and supported by everyone in the community.”

—Quint Studer

Summary:

- One of Quint Studer’s influences in his community development work was Jim Clifton, chairman of Gallup and author of *The Coming Jobs War*. One of his takeaways from Clifton is that great cities focus on building entrepreneurs and growing the companies that are already there.
- That’s why Quint includes entrepreneurship and small business growth as one of the four “power circles” of a vibrant community, and why he started The Spring Entrepreneur Hub. The Spring serves as the front door to Pensacola’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, a “triage center” for new and aspiring business owners.
- As chief entrepreneur officer for The Spring, D.C. Reeves noted: “What we want to see is moving from 1 employee to 2. That is the hardest jump.”

Reflections from attendees:

- Key to a vibrant downtown is small businesses that create lots of foot traffic.
- How can we lower the barrier to entry for these types of businesses?



LESSON 6: BECOME AN EARLY LEARNING CITY (AND REGION)

“There’s always a mom there who’s going to need the encouragement.” —Frecny Moore, SCI Community Outreach Coordinator



Summary:

- Pensacola has a goal to become America’s first Early Learning City – one in which all parts of the community work as one to give every child the best chance to succeed.
- Becoming an Early Learning City is a team effort, and we heard from key members of the Pensacola team – from Studer Community Institute staff, to the President of the Children’s Hospital, to a former NFL Super Bowl champion turned philanthropist.
- They discussed SCI’s early learning programs and their impact and how critical this work is as a long-term strategy for the community.

Next steps:

- Community organizations and hospital leaders in Acadiana are meeting to discuss partnerships around an early learning initiative for our region in line with the Pensacola model.
- The first CivicCon Acadiana event of 2023 (on January 11) will feature Dr. Ronald Ferguson of Harvard on the topic of early learning.



LESSON 7: RAISE CIVIC IQ

“Great cities begin with great dialogue.”
—Quint Studer

Summary:

- Five years ago, the Studer Community Institute partnered with the Pensacola News Journal to launch “CivicCon,” a civic conversation series that aims to raise civic IQ and inspire citizen-powered change.
- As panel moderator Lisa Nellesen Savage explained, Pensacola was growing fast but not growing smart. SCI and PNJ realized they needed more knowledge of what smart planning looked like.
- Said Lisa: “CivicCon changed the way I think.”
- We also heard from young leaders inspired by CivicCon to change their career trajectory, starting new businesses and running for local office.

Next steps:

- One Acadiana launched the “[CivicCon Acadiana](#)” series in late 2021, and the series will continue and grow going into 2023.



LESSON 8: BE INCLUSIVE, AND CAPTURE THE YOUTH

"A lot of what you see [downtown] began with Community Maritime Park and with PYP being at the table." —Rick Outzen

Summary:

- A vibrant community is inclusive of all groups, particularly young people.
- Our first panel discussion featured current and former leaders from the Pensacola Young Professionals (PYP) organization.
- Panel moderator Rick Outzen, publisher of *Independent News*, helped found PYP in 2006, along with the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce. The purpose was to give young people a seat at the table and get them involved in community leadership.
- Soon after its founding, PYP endorsed the Community Maritime Park project and played a key role in the campaign to pass a citywide vote on the project after it was challenged in a referendum.

Reflections from attendees:

- How can we roll out our community's "red carpet" for young people?

LESSON 9: CELEBRATE SMALL, INCREMENTAL WINS

"You've got to prime the pump, and once you prime the pump, great things happen." —Quint Studer

Summary:

- At our closing session, the final question posed to Quint Studer was if he would have done anything different. His response: more patience at building critical mass and bringing others along with him.
- One way to build critical mass is achieving and celebrating small, incremental wins that bolster people's enthusiasm and confidence.
- Each new shop that opened in downtown Pensacola was a small win that helped keep the momentum going. Ultimately, through these small wins, Palafox Street started to fill up, and it went from a dying street to one of the "Ten Great Streets in America."
- Communicating about these wins, and how they connect to bigger picture goals, is just as important – to keep the results in front of people and build trust.

Reflections from attendees:

- "We need to start celebrating wins every time they happen, no matter how small."
- "Revitalization happens one project at a time."



LESSON 10: WE'RE WELL ON OUR WAY

Summary:

- The post-trip debrief and other follow-up conversations reinforced that Acadiana already has much to celebrate in line with the “power circles” of a vibrant community. For example:
 - The “Vibrant Acadiana” framework, along with the QOL Survey and regional dashboard measurement tools (at VibrantAcadiana.org)
 - The CivicCon Acadiana event series
 - New and emerging Downtown businesses and development projects
 - An ecosystem of organizations supporting entrepreneurship and small business growth
 - Organizations and individuals willing to lead the charge on early brain development

Next steps:

- CivicCon Acadiana will continue on November 14, when Quint Studer joins us to present the results of our second annual QOL Survey.
- Attendees continue to unpack lessons learned and meet about carrying these lessons forward.
- It is anticipated the next Leadership Exchange trip will take place in 2024.



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