

2013 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP VISIT

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

NASHVILLE, TN





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INTRODUCTION



Courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation



Courtesy of Music City Center

The idea of Nashville has typically generated images of honky tonk bars, country music, and cowboy boots. And although those are components of the culture of the city in the heart of Tennessee, the Nashville of today goes far beyond the country music cliché of its past. The New York Times-dubbed “It city” of 2013 has harnessed its creative roots, sharpened its focus on community strengths and leveraged those strengths with a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

A group of 60 Springfield leaders explored Nashville’s success during

a three-day community leadership visit in mid-September. This was the Chamber’s 20th such trip to gather ideas and inspiration from the experience of another community, and the trip to Nashville included the largest Springfield delegation to date.

In Nashville it was all about focus. From the Mayor to the young entrepreneur, Nashville knows its brand.

“We fought long and hard over what Nashville’s brand was. The brand is Music City,” said Terry Clements of the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Developing Nashville's brand has involved focusing on the areas that have the greatest return on investment for the community and not getting distracted by the ones that don't. Collective community efforts drove the development of a brand new \$565 million Music City Convention Center, focused their talent attraction efforts around key areas of opportunity, and created an entrepreneurial ecosystem for fostering start-up companies and encouraging job growth.

Not only is the community collectively focused on generating big, bold ideas, they are translating those ideas into reality with big, bold funding strategies. With public and private partners coming together to fund initiatives that the community has deemed important, these efforts are delivering in big ways. This concept was perhaps best articulated at the Nashville Entrepreneur Center (The EC).

"If people aren't willing to commit time or money to what you want to do, it is just conversation," said Michael Burcham, President/CEO, The EC.

One of the "community highlights" that was touted multiple times is the 27 percent disposable income average that exists as a result of a relatively low cost of living and a higher than average wage rate. This is a talent attraction advantage as well as an important component of entrepreneurial success because a considerable portion of Nashville's disposable income is reinvested in businesses. Panelists routinely talked about their big ideas coming to fruition as a result of the financial support from key stakeholders.

The same collective vision was evident as Nashville leaders discussed their community's vulnerabilities. When asked



Courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation

what challenges the city faces, it was as if every community leader shared the same talking points, emphasizing what needs to happen to keep Nashville from becoming the "It" city of yesterday. With nearly 80 percent of public school students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, there are significant challenges in local public education – but also aggressive efforts underway to address them. Even though crime rates have improved in Nashville, community leaders still express concern over public safety. And a gaping lag in public transportation is failing to meet the demand created by rapid population growth, so Mayor Karl Dean is pushing a long-range vision for public transportation improvements that include investment in a light rail system.

It's not a surprise that Nashville has received national accolades for its efforts in recent years. The success has not been accidental. It is thoughtful, strategic and



Courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Corporation

focused – with the real standouts being the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem, talent development and innovations in education.

CREATING NASHVILLE'S ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM



Nashville has come to understand the importance of investing in entrepreneurs, and creating a climate conducive to entrepreneurial growth and success. Entrepreneurism in Nashville is collaborative and, according to entrepreneur Kate O'Neill, that spirit of collaboration is symbolic of the Music City's songwriting culture of "co-writing." Nashville's ability to attract creative talent has also paid dividends as individuals have migrated to other fields to apply their creativity, even if they originally arrived in Nashville to pursue opportunities in the music industry.

The concept for The EC was originally discussed in 2008. Community leaders understood the importance of establishing a "front door" for would-be entrepreneurs to gain access to a support system that includes mentors and funding, among other assets. In 2010, The EC was established in a temporary location and has since grown into a permanent multi-million dollar facility.

“If you are really creative, come to Nashville...”

Michael Burcham
The EC



The \$5 million capital campaign for the facility was achieved in just a few months, and support came primarily from the business community.

The EC serves as a gateway that brings together training, relationships, and other resources in order to cultivate economic development and drive Nashville's position as an entrepreneurial epicenter. The EC emphasizes four sectors: Health Care, Technology, Digital Media and Entertainment, and Social Enterprise.

The EC's President/CEO Michael Burcham spoke to the Springfield delegation about the ingredients necessary to establish a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem in a community. One key component of The EC's success has been a tight screening process to assess the viability of an entrepreneur's ideas and business plan. Those with high growth opportunities are connected to seasoned and successful entrepreneurs for assistance with business modeling,

seed capital, mentoring, and other startup tools. Burcham believes that focusing on and supporting the high growth startups that he refers to as “the gazelles” will help ensure success and allow for the most effective use of available resources.

The EC has made it a priority to attract outside investment by creating a climate that causes investors to want to participate for fear of missing out, known as “FOMO.” Particular emphasis has been on seed capital for up to \$50,000, as it is the hardest funding to secure but the most critical since it is typically required during the developmental prototype phase. Currently, The EC has an aggressive goal of reaching \$8 million in funding to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization and its support for startups.

Another key component for a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem is a strong mentoring program that attracts top leaders and successful entrepreneurs.



One specific example is The EC's Jumpstart Foundry, a 14-week, mentor-driven business acceleration program culminating in the launch of successful startups, showcased at an Investor Day event where entrepreneurs make their “pitch” to potential investors.

What began as an initiative led by the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce has evolved into an innovative world-class facility reaching thousands of entrepreneurs and investors in just a few short years. Through diverse partnerships including Vanderbilt University and Google, among others, The EC is serving as the hub that has helped Nashville achieve recognition as a top five city for young entrepreneurs.

TALENT ATTRACTION

Nashville's entrepreneurial success is both a talent attraction magnet and a cause for business growth that further drives the community's workforce needs. Nashville leaders

as "WorkIT Nashville," a multi-faceted campaign to recruit technology workers to the region. The initiative has a two-pronged approach. First, it provides information to potential workers and their

Another example of Nashville's commitment to talent attraction and workforce readiness is the Middle Tennessee Regional Workforce Alliance. The Alliance was formed by several stakeholder groups in 2013 that came together to focus on three industry sectors: health care, advanced manufacturing and information technology. Regional skills panels made up of industry and education leaders meet to identify emerging skills and competencies needed in the regional workforce. Alliance leaders then work together to identify creative solutions to address these workforce skills gaps, including changes to curriculum at both the K-12 and higher education level.

Again, in the area of talent development, Nashville's strength is focus. Leaders are focused on where the jobs will be in the future and they are working to direct students into those fields through effective collaboration between business and education.

are dedicated to strengthening the area's workforce, with ongoing efforts ranging from talent recruitment and retention strategies to collaborative support for multiple thriving young professional organizations.

The Nashville Chamber spearheaded the effort to develop a program known

families about the thriving technology sector as well as the community and culture in Nashville. Second, it provides a unique job-matching technology that benefits both job seekers and local companies. In the first year alone, the roughly \$300,000 price tag was fully funded by the business community.



INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

Community leaders agree that one of Nashville's greatest challenges is the public school system. Following desegregation in the 1960s, private schools in the area saw a dramatic increase in enrollment, which is seen as the beginning of the problems still plaguing Nashville public schools today. In fact, many community leaders who addressed the Springfield delegation attended private schools or currently send their children to private schools; however, these same individuals remain committed to improving the public school system through the spirit of collaboration.

The Springfield delegation saw this effort as the definition of business/education partnership. The community has not deemed this a "problem for the public schools" but rather a "community problem." This sentiment was best articulated by Steve Turner, Founder of MarketStreet Equities Company and one of Nashville's top philanthropists. "I don't support schools because it's the noble thing to do, I support it because it's the smart thing. I know the future of my city depends on it," shared Turner.

The most aggressive action taken by the public school system has been implementation of the Academies of Nashville. Academies allow students to choose a thematic course of study, such as engineering, health care, information technology or International Baccalaureate, and learn in a relevant, hands-on environment with real-world application.



Courtesy of Metro Nashville Public Schools

Academies offer the learning opportunities of themed magnet schools in a smaller, more personalized environment. Ultimately, the Academies have shown they provide rigorous curriculum and better prepare students for success in college, career and life. Outcomes have included increased graduation rates, an increase in achievement and ACT scores, and a decrease in discipline referrals.

One other bold approach to failing schools in Tennessee is the state-run Achievement School District (ASD). The ASD was formed to turn around Tennessee's lowest-performing schools – with the goal of moving the bottom

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Steve Turner
MarketStreet Equities Company



Courtesy of Ryan Mooney

While city leaders have demonstrated that education improvement is paramount, including Mayor Dean's support of a budget increase of \$40 million to increase starting teachers' pay, much work still remains. There have been substantial gains through the Academies program and charter school efforts, but the vast majority of students in the traditional public school model are still substantially underachieving compared to their peers around the state and country.

five percent to the top 25 percent in five years. The ASD has the authority to either directly manage these schools or to authorize charter operators to manage them. These charter schools are given complete autonomy in exchange for strict accountability and improved student outcomes, with the goal of turning the school back over to the local district after five years.

To ensure accountability, the Nashville Chamber produces an annual education report card that examines the overall school system performance for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. With a 20-year history, this annual report is now seen by district officials and state education leaders as the official benchmark and a catalyst for prompting drastic but necessary tactics to create systemic change. The level of commitment is significant as the Chamber and its members have pledged \$6 million annually toward education efforts.



ACHIEVING SUCCESS

THROUGH FOCUS AND COLLABORATION

The common theme that runs through all areas of Nashville's success seems to be the twin attributes of focus and collaboration. Easy to say and harder to do, Nashville leaders have developed the discipline to let go of lesser priorities and avoid distractions as they apply focus to understanding their community's strengths and challenges, and creating a vision that builds on the strengths and bolsters the weaknesses.

Creativity is a major community strength fueling an entrepreneurial mindset that now permeates a wide range of industry sectors from health care and technology to entertainment and social enterprise. The Nashville model of entrepreneurship is collaborative, placing a high value on mentors who are willing to share their experience and insights with those attempting startup ventures.

Springfield is also a community known for collaboration but this level of involvement and guidance by successful entrepreneurs would be a welcome improvement to our community's entrepreneurial culture. The Music City's culture of "co-writing" is still a bit foreign to the independent strain of entrepreneurs in the Missouri Ozarks.

Likewise, Springfield can learn from Nashville's example of focus. In addition to building on their strengths, focus has given Nashville leaders a common



Courtesy of Johnathan L. Jones | @thephotojones

perspective on the areas of their community in need of improvement – education, transportation and crime. While Springfield is not facing the same level of challenge in these areas, our community could benefit from greater awareness and a unity of purpose in addressing these basic elements of community health.

Education, transportation and public safety form the foundation that supports economic development. Like Nashville, we need to notice the cracks that are developing and work together – with focus – to repair those cracks before they become obstacles to economic growth and community betterment.

“It’s easy to see why Nashville has become the “It city.” The creativity, energy, and economic vitality were evident throughout our visit.”

Brian Fogle
Community Foundation
of the Ozarks

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