

Shaping the Future

Community Engages in Internal Examination

By Rebecca Patrick

The simple truth of “know thyself” originated in an ancient Greek metropolis, but Shelbyville, Indiana – a city with 18,000 residents – is following that wise philosophy today, examining its strengths and weaknesses so it can properly position what it has to offer to those on the outside.

Area leaders are accomplishing this through, among other initiatives, a series of image meetings bringing together top government officials and the public, a plan to capitalize on the close proximity of the forthcoming Honda plant in Greensburg and supporting an expansion of the Indiana Downs racetrack.

Laying the groundwork for progress

Shelbyville’s job landscape is like countless other Hoosier communities of similar size – mainly blue collar – but the difference is that many of its companies are foreign-owned, with eight coming from Japan, two from Germany and one each from England, Mexico and the Netherlands.

Dan Theobald, executive director of the Shelby County Development Corporation and former Shelbyville mayor, says it was a harsh reality that brought an international flair to town some 20 years ago.

“I was mayor in the 1980s and our unemployment rate got up to 23%; that was worse than it was during the Depression. If you went to the grocery store, one in four people you ran into were out of a job. So we had to do something,” he recalls. “I went to Japan and (successfully) recruited Ryobi (Die Castings) and PK U.S.A. We then had Mitsubishi, Toyota and Saturn look closely at us for assembly plants.”

Even though Shelbyville came up short in those automotive bids, it proved a rewarding process. “Because of all of that, we had suppliers figure that those large automakers had done the due diligence (for us to be in final contention), so there must be something here. That’s how the auto suppliers came,” Theobald explains.

From there, the global approach was born. Today, according to current Shelbyville Mayor Scott Furgeson, “Japanese investment accounts for about 60% of the jobs, and Knauf, our largest employer at 700 jobs, comes from Germany.”

The top two Japanese companies – Ryobi and PK U.S.A. – have nearly 700 and 500 employees, respectively.

Perhaps the most significant impact of welcoming global companies has been the self-reliance Shelbyville has gained.

“We have our own economy. Per capita, we probably have more manufacturing firms – and Japanese investments – than anybody else (in the state),” Theobald suggests.

“We do not depend on Indianapolis like some of the other (doughnut) cities have to because we finally have more people driving to Shelbyville to work than driving out of Shelbyville, and it was never like that 20 years ago. I’m not exactly sure when that happened, but after we opened all the Japanese companies, at some point in time, it rolled over.”

Looking in the mirror

City officials and community leaders are keenly aware that more can and must be done for Shelbyville to keep pace.

“We’ve got to continue to work on our image. We’ve got to continue to work on being more of a player in Central Indiana, so as far as I’m concerned, the onus is on us to do that,” declares



Shelbyville’s historic Public Square still serves as a business/community hub. Civic leader Dan Theobald points to the I-74 corridor, where much recent expansion has occurred.

Tony Lennen, president and CEO of Major Hospital.

“We have the technology. We have the workforce. We have a great educational system here. We just need to tell our story better – and I know the city is working on that.”

This summer and fall, Mayor Furgeson, other city officials, Theobald and interested residents have been engaging in self-reflection on Shelbyville’s behalf.

“We’re trying to come up with the best way to present ourselves,” Furgeson states. “We understand that our county is rural, and the county doesn’t really want to see much growth. They would like to see the city grow. ... The trick then will be to find an effective way to market that message.”

When it comes to specific strengths Shelbyville can tout, the mayor cites a low tax rate, a willingness of government to team with industries and a hardworking group of residents.

“Also, I believe our school system is doing great things; I would put it up against any in the country,” Furgeson contends.

The biggest hurdle? Making enhancements to the area’s quality of life.

One development due to be completed next spring is an 186-acre city-county park with 18 acres of soccer fields and an adult softball complex. On the horizon: more shopping.

“We have very few retail opportunities, but we’re trying to change that. We’ve got 40 new acres of retail land that’s become available right in the heart of east State Road 44 in the city,” Furgeson offers.

The real key to retail taking off is for the area’s population to increase, Theobald asserts.

“We simply need to get more rooftops, so we’re trying to get more people to move here so the retail will move here. We’ve got the industry, now we’ve got to get the people.

“For example, some of those people who are driving here to work, we want them to move here. That way, we can get their children in our schools – where we have existing capacity. We can get their spouses in our workforce and make the community even better.”

Betting big on Honda, Indiana Downs

One possible pool of future Shelbyville residents consists of workers from the nearby Honda facility in Decatur County, only 15 miles away.

“We’ve been doing full-page advertising in Marysville, Ohio, where Honda is located, and where most communities are trying to get the suppliers,” Theobald reveals.

Adds Furgeson, “The end result in the near future could be to have another 1,000-plus people move here – 500 Honda workers and their families. The good news is that we’re well positioned to accommodate that growth.”

Over the last four years, an average of 100 homes has



Mayor Scott Furgeson has guided recent efforts to assess Shelbyville’s image.

been built in the area. Prior to that time, the annual number was 20.

“We were just trying to build a community. We didn’t know Honda was coming at the time,” Theobald explains. “But when Honda announced they were coming to Greensburg, we were four years ahead of Greensburg or anybody else in the area with building for the future.”

Another pending boon for the area is the \$500 million expansion of Indiana Downs into what’s called a racino – a horseracing track with other on-site gambling options like slot machines – creating 800 jobs.

“It will be huge. I don’t think Shelbyville or Shelby County understands how big that’s going to be. That’s a Honda; actually, it’s bigger than Honda. It’s going to employ not quite as many, but the revenue the community will get off of that will be tremendous,” Theobald predicts.

“Most of the people who will go there won’t be from here, but they will have a big impact on our local economy.”

The intent, says Furgeson, is for Shelbyville to become the “entertainment capital of Interstate 74.

“They’re planning on building a fabulous facility, so it’s exciting to see what all they’re thinking about. Obviously, they’re going to have slot machines, but I think it’s the ancillary things that go along with it that we’re most excited about,” he maintains.

“They’re talking, from the broadest range, of even putting a little shopping center out there and having some retail opportunities, to having a theater where they’ll have concerts and other things.

In spring 2008, Indiana Downs will boast more than horse racing when its slot-machine casino opens.

A photograph of the Indiana Downs racetrack. At the top is a large sign with the "INDIANA DOWNS" logo. Below it is a digital scoreboard displaying race information. At the bottom is another sign with the "INDIANA DOWNS" logo.

ODDS	TIME	POST	RACE No.	MIN TO POST	RESULTS	PLACE	86
9	59				1ST	1	3
10	29				2ND	2	---
11			1		3RD	3	2
12							

Update on Intelliplex

For better or worse, what has got much recent attention – both within Shelbyville and throughout Central Indiana – is Intelliplex, the city's certified technology park (CTP). Originally designated in August 2003, Intelliplex came up for review this year by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation due to new state legislation, amid some local outcry for faster results. In early October, Intelliplex was recertified, but a series of conditions were set for it to keep that status.

Among those terms: building a flexible-use facility that will offer lab space or other amenities for housing high-wage technology businesses, plus attracting one or more additional tech-based businesses or support expansion of such an existing business that results in 50 new, full-time high-paying jobs.

For Tony Lennen, president and CEO of Major Hospital – the group behind the Intelliplex venture – there is relief tempered with reality.

“Obviously, the state wants us to do some things that in their judgment will make the park more attractive and, in return, I’m hoping that the state will be working with us more to give us some more leads on different projects. In my point of view, the state is in the best position to control where these job opportunities go,” he surmises.

“It’s very difficult for any single county if you don’t have a Carmel, Noblesville or West Lafayette – you’re not thought of being as attractive, so we need the state’s help. We just want to work with the state to do all we can to make this thing better. I think it’s just particularly challenging for the tech parks that are not in those areas or at a university.”

To those who are “reveling in the fact that Intelliplex isn’t working in their minds,” Lennen offers candid rebuttals.

Foremost, the site was going to be developed by Major Hospital – with our without the CTP designation, he asserts. “We decided to build there before there was ever a notion of a tech park or legislation to enable it because we needed space for a second campus; we were extremely landlocked at our existing site. Locally, there’s been some criticism that the hospital put jobs out there to make the park look better. That is fallacious. We were going to expand there anyway.”

As for the perception that progress hasn’t moved swiftly



enough, Lennen believes the general public’s expectations were unrealistic.

“I don’t think any of us who were in the middle of this thought it would happen overnight; I think we all thought this was a 10 or 15-year thing at minimum,” he states. “I grew up in Lafayette and people forget that the Purdue Research Park started in 1967; that was 40 years ago. It has just literally hit its stride in the last 36 months.”

“Intelliplex has realistically been open for only two years. The frustrating thing for us is we were the finalist for one company that ended up staying close to where it was. There was a Fortune 100 company that was interested in building a brilliant data center here, but right before (a decision was made) they pulled the plug on the whole thing and decided to do it themselves,” he notes.

Intelliplex currently has interest from several data centers. “We’re actually negotiating with one of those on a piece of property out there. Data centers and call centers that are tied to using the fiber (optics) are probably our two best prospects right now,” Lennen shares.

“Honestly, I think it’s been much more difficult than anyone would have ever dreamed to attract these kinds of jobs. Our thing is, we’re just trying to position our site out there and not over-react and compromise what we’re trying to do by filling the park with stuff that really is too far from our original mission. And believe me, it has taken a lot of patience and a lot of courage to do that.”

**Resources: Tony Lennen, Major Hospital, at (317) 392-3211
Intelliplex at www.intelliplex.org**

I think the future is very bright with that.”

Ultimate vision

For Theobald, going forward is all about growth. “Shelbyville is the only county that touches Marion County that hasn’t grown, so there are several of us who are positioning us to be that next county that has that happen,” he states.

Ferguson acknowledges that all the talk of expansion has some residents concerned, albeit unduly so. “Everybody says we don’t want to be Carmel or Fishers. Well, we’re never going to be Carmel or Fishers, so we don’t have to worry about that. What I see for the city is for us to get to a size of 20,000-21,000. Then, we would be able to provide some of those

retail opportunities for our residents that we don’t have now.

“Beyond that, with our certified tech park, Intelliplex, we’re obviously looking to raise the bar and have some better paying jobs in our community and attract people to our community,” he notes.

“Down the road, a goal for the city is to become a destination that people want to come to, not just a place where you live because you work here.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Mayor Scott Ferguson, City of Shelbyville, at (317) 398-6624

Dan Theobald, Shelby County Development Corporation, at (317) 398-8903 or www.shelbydevelopment.com