

Battle Creek as an Open & Inviting Place to Do Business

A Project 20/20 Leadership Meeting

September 28, 2011

Burnham Brook, 7:30 a.m.



Welcome and Opening Comments

Talia Champlin opened the meeting with introductions and an overview of the meeting agenda. The theme for the meeting was “Battle Creek as an Open & Inviting Place to Do Business”. Talia reminded attendees that Project 20/20 facilitates these important conversations among leaders and community members to move Battle Creek toward excellence. Talia then introduced Tetsuo Ozaki.

Presentations by Tetsuo Ozaki, Michael Facenda and Mike Wood

Tetsuo Ozaki, President of Toda America, Inc. gave an overview of the company and its history. The company is formed by a 50/50 joint venture between Toda Kogyo (a chemical material company) and ITOCHU Corporation (a trading company). Toda America is a cathode materials production plant for lithium-ion batteries as used in electric vehicles. Toda America received a Department of Energy grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Instead of choosing a location in Goose Creek, South Carolina, Battle Creek became Toda America’s home for their production facility. Battle Creek was chosen because of the proximity to multiple clients (but not too close to a single customer) and due to 25 years of long-standing, good relationships with local Japanese manufacturers. Mr. Ozaki highlighted Battle Creek Unlimited, MichiganWorks! and Kellogg Community College’s Regional Manufacturing & Technology Center as factors of their success. Thus far, the company has hired 30 employees with more than 20 of them hired locally. Some of the challenges they have encountered include: tax benefits (amount and frequent changes in elections/policies), finding labor with specialized skills for lithium-ion battery production, frequent power failures, and lack of rental availability for new employees. Depending upon the demand for electric vehicles, Toda America could produce up to 4,000 tons/year of lithium-ion cathode materials. If the market fares well, construction could begin on another building to accommodate their growth.

Michael Facenda, Director of Marketing at FireKeepers Casino, shared challenges and successes for FireKeepers Casino. After being able to get the FireKeepers’ land into trust after a 10 year journey, the Tribe was able to quickly bring the casino to market. They were able to find people that needed work in a time when work was not readily available to build their \$300 million facility. Construction is currently taking place on a \$75 million hotel with 242 guest rooms, guest suites, a pool, an exercise facility, a business center and a 2,000 seat multi-purpose event center. Last year, several successful concerts were held with the possibility to expand on that in the future. Every effort is being made to hire local contractors for the work. Mr. Facenda cited the need to find the right employees. FireKeepers Casino maintains high standards for customer service and finding quality employees is essential. FireKeepers is looking forward to expanding their market to surrounding areas and making the casino and Battle Creek a destination.

Mike Wood, Owner of Team Active Cycling and Fitness, gave a brief overview of the history of his 25 year old company. The business is based on the philosophy of delivering the highest quality product with the best possible service. Based in the downtown since 1992, Team Active

has been successful largely because of hard work and perseverance. Mr. Wood discussed the importance of learning from mistakes and making sure any bad mistakes or decisions don't get repeated. Lastly, Mr. Wood cited his passion for Battle Creek and for health, fitness and wellness – all of which have contributed to Team Active's success.

Group Discussion and Input

Following the presentations, members were asked to participate in a small group discussion. The following two questions were posed: 1) How do we build upon the success of businesses like Toda America, FireKeepers Casino and Team Active? and 2) What can we do to make our community more open and inviting to businesses?

A discussion question was assigned to each table (each question was discussed by 3 or 4 tables). An individual from each discussion table shared one key point with the group (however, some shared more than one). All additional ideas are located at the end of this document.

Key Points Reported by Each Group

- 1) How do we build upon the success of businesses like Toda America, FireKeepers Casino and Team Active?
 - Need a forum to hear from business and to discuss issues
 - Build a more “formal/organized” mentoring community within business owners/leaders (to help walk through systems that they may face), increased networking among businesses, relationship building
 - Improved education, more specialized to new employees
- 2) What can we do to make our community more open and inviting to businesses?
 - Highlight central location
 - Dispel stigma of high labor → offer specialized training, drives cost down
 - Everyone is a positive marketer for the community
 - Quality employees – teach at all levels (family unit, school), “always looking for good people”
 - Where is organization/resource that connects the need to resource?
 - Identify and market beyond Battle Creek and prior to decision making by business (orientation and ambassadors)
 - Make it easier for businesses e.g. emphasize what BCU does, simplify government's role – serve customers more than enforce rules

Closing Comments

Members were encouraged to attend upcoming Project 20/20 Community Forums. On October 18, a business summit on early childhood education, “Early Learning is Good Business” will be held from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. (refreshments served at 5:30 p.m.) at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation located at One Michigan Avenue East in downtown Battle Creek. On November 10 from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. a forum on the Downtown Transformation will take place at the Burnham Brook Community Center at 200 W. Michigan Avenue. A 2011 meeting schedule is available at www.bcproject2020.com.

Members were asked to complete a survey, make a donation, become a fan of Project 20/20 on Facebook or follow our tweets, visit the Project 20/20 website at www.bcproject2020.com and invite others to join us.

Additional Ideas from Small Group Discussion

- 1) How do we build upon the success of businesses like Toda America, FireKeepers Casino and Team Active?
 - Find and fix problems to keep and attract business
 - Selling the available resources
 - Look at services already offered by BCU, Chamber, Downtown Partnership and have honest and open conversation about who is doing what. Identify needs and gaps.
 - Ask businesses (new and existing) what they need/want.
 - Support local efforts to increase workforce development and skills that employers want their employees to have (hard skills and soft skills)
 - Personal commitment to support/shop at locally owned businesses
 - How can we re-invent the opportunities to build skills as children/teens grow their own work ethic (such as baggers at grocery store, newspaper delivery, etc.)?
 - Grow/strengthen the intern/volunteers housed at businesses (not just non-profits)
 - Shorten approval process – simplify (reasonable, less people involved)
 - More financing options
 - Better tax benefits
 - Better quality of applicants
 - How do we stop the brain drain?
 - People need to be better educated for the jobs we have
 - Expand “RMTC” style to other skills like marketing, hospitality
 - How hungry are we to work? Social skills, work ethic
 - Passion, culture of hard work and customer service
 - Training in basic employment skills
 - Fostering an “I love to work” attitude
 - Accountability in the classroom for producing results – do you want to be here?
 - Get students while they are young
 - Eradicate the goal of being “gainfully unemployed”
 - Is the power outage problem a prevailing concern? – put it in the ground
 - Assumed Fort Custer had a great grid
 - Framework of employability with easy ability to specialize or upgrade (passion, social skills, work skills, mechanical abilities) publicized for specialization
 - What does an employer need from you?

- 2) What can we do to make our community more open and inviting to businesses?
 - Easy: look here and see profit
 - Rental houses → minor issue
 - Rentals (foreclosures, rentals, buy)
 - Removing barriers – regulatory, locally?
 - Business mentors – having someone help as a guide to work through
 - Training for employers (RMTC)
 - Better marketing benefits e.g. Legacy Scholars, internships