

# What they had to say about the trip

A group of 40 civic, business and community leaders visited Milwaukee, Wis., from Sept. 18-20 to learn what were considered “best practices” from that city and its leaders. Participants were invited by the Akron Beacon Journal to share their views on what they experienced and how they would like to see Akron move forward. A few leaders submitted comments that exceeded the 100 words requested. A few, such as staffers of the Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce, did not submit comments, saying they would rather have the community leaders on the trip share their thoughts.

Here are their comments:



## **Virginia C. Albanese**

**President and chief executive, FedEx Custom Critical Inc.; chair of Greater Akron Chamber board; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

I walked away from the Inter-City visit knowing that Akron is on track for a bright future. With such committed community leaders, we will improve our economic base, enhance and attract talent and renew our urban environment. Collaboration among business, government, educators, non-profits and the medical community will ensure we achieve these goals.

I feel certain that Akron will have an extremely positive future if we encourage innovation, create alignment on goals and priorities, accept accountability for projects and outcomes, collaborate with our partners and communicate often with our citizens. Together we will make Akron an even better place for generations to come.

Thank you, Chamber, for putting on such a great inter-city visit. The inaugural trip was excellent!



## **Elizabeth Z. Bartz**

**President & CEO, State and Federal Communications Inc.; member, Greater Akron Chamber board and Chamber Services Council**

It is important we keep the momentum moving in Akron. There are many things we already have in place, but at times our own system trips us up.

Are we open for business? Are we offering the best products and services to the people of Akron?

How can we take advantage of the strong relationship between the Mayor's office and the business community of Akron? Utilizing this relationship can present opportunities not only to the neighborhoods and people of Akron but also extending out to the many visitors we have — whether they be friends of locals, tourists, or potential new business enterprises looking to participate in Akron's enthusiasm.



## **Robert Y. Bowman**

**Deputy Mayor, Mayor's Office of Economic Development**

The trip verified that for cities to be great they need to be participating in the global economy. That was verified here in Milwaukee. They believe they've got to connect with the world through their water initiative.

Likewise, we're doing the same with our biomedical initiative – with Israel, Germany, Finland and connections to China and whatever will come out of that.

The most impressive thing to me was the talent initiatives at the groups called Spreenkler and BizStarts. They're stepping beyond entrepreneurs and trying to see potential entrepreneurs. The Grand Avenue Mall was other verification that states change their administrations constantly. You have to have your own initiative because regions can change because states change.



## **Nicholas V. Browning**

**President and chief executive, FirstMerit Bank/Akron; Greater Akron Chamber board member**

My sincere thanks go to the City of Milwaukee for being such a gracious host to our Akron delegation. I found that Milwaukee reflects the incredible urban and economic redevelopment that can occur in a dynamic Midwest city through public/private collaboration. In the last 20 years, Akron has undergone its own renaissance. While Akron doesn't have Milwaukee's lakefront and river, which have been magnets for residential and commercial development in Milwaukee, we do have unique assets such as polymers, biotechnology, healthcare, universities, a vibrant business community and of course our incredible park system that we will continue to leverage.

I see many similarities with what's been accomplished in Akron through our own high degree of collaboration between the public and private sectors. In many cases, the public sector has paved the way for transformation by investing dollars in reclamation and repurposing. This has spurred significant private sector investment. A collaborative spirit might be our greatest asset, and I'm excited to see our public and private partners working together to keep Akron thriving.



## **S. Theresa Carter**

**President, Omnova Solutions Foundation; Greater Akron Chamber Vice Chair, Chamber Services, Executive Committee**

The Inter-City visit to Milwaukee was an incredible opportunity to explore a city whose effective collaborations and focused clear vision resulted in its ongoing successful, transformation. Their philanthropic efforts led primarily by the Greater Milwaukee Committee were astounding. It was evident that there were many champions who forged partnerships to ensure the success of each venture.

Like Akron, they too showed great passion for strengthening their community through investing in talent, innovation and urban revitalization. There was great benefit in sharing those strategies.



## **Daniel C. Colantone**

**President and chief executive, Greater Akron Chamber; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

The Akron public-private partnership has aligned their collective efforts to build upon a vision for future economic growth in urban revitalization, educational attainment and economic development. Visiting Milwaukee offered the opportunity to see how their leadership comes together to impact positive change. We had time to build upon existing relationships and develop new connections with other leaders. There was a collective sense of validation that Akron's current success will continue to accelerate as we focus on the top priorities that will have the greatest impact to create jobs for the citizens in our community.



## **William H. Considine**

**President, Akron Children's Hospital; Greater Akron Chamber board member; Immediate past chair of Akron Tomorrow**

Our Milwaukee Inter-City visit affirmed the importance of sharing experiences and learning from one another. The robust conversation did serve as affirmation that alignment of the public/private sector is a must in economic development. A positive "can-do" attitude is also essential in turning possibilities into realities. Collaboration is one of our community's strengths and can be a key in advancing agendas in talent attraction and urban and economic development.

A major benefit of the visit is the networking that transpired among the Akron contingent. The three days involved celebration of community engagement, affirmation of positive attitude, the engagement of community leaders for a greater good, and an expressed interest from our leaders in being part of our exciting future. We also need to

continue our dialogue, connect with our young professionals and our children, providing them a realistic vision as to their role in our community's possibilities.

My final thought is Akron is my hometown and I'm proud of it.

Three takeaway words: Attitude, Collaboration, Leadership.



## **Dr. Frank L. Douglas**

**President and chief executive, Austen BioInnovation Institute in Akron; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

The three approaches that I found quite instructive were focus on clusters, leadership by the business community, and focus on wealth building as a way to generate jobs.

It is impressive that the business community recognized the importance of their natural resource, water, and created a cluster around it. They have widened the concept and have recognized that talent development via programs in the university and colleges, as well as high schools, are necessary to create jobs and retain talent in the area.

We have natural clusters in polymers, health care and energy in greater Akron and **the business community needs to lead** as in Milwaukee.

The City of Akron is a designated Ohio Hub of Innovation and Opportunity in Biomaterials. ABIA (Austen BioInnovation Institute in Akron) is an Ohio Center of Excellence in Biomaterials, Orthopedics and Wound Healing. The College of Polymer Science and Engineering is in the top three in the U.S. and top five, globally. We need to Carpe Diem! Or better said, We need to seize the Cluster!

Their focus on companies that **export** products with the recognition that this creates jobs in sectors that **support** and **supply** components and services to such companies was quite impressive.

It was surprising that the link with the biomedical community is weak. Here is an opportunity for Akron.



## **Jeffrey Ferguson**

**Superintendent, Tallmadge schools**

As a local school superintendent that borders Akron, I believe that future success will be measured by our ability to move the region forward, not just the city of Akron. The collaborative nature by which our colleagues in Milwaukee tackled a given problem -- often times transcending geographic boundaries -- was a real "a-ha" moment for me. The students and families in Tallmadge face similar

challenges that others face all over the region. I was very glad to hear my colleagues on this trip discuss the development and retention of talent as a major priority. Milwaukee's Cradle to Career program was a great example of the beginning framework to collaboratively address that goal. Seeing a commitment of the leaders from business, local government, education, and philanthropy to spend three days together around a common goal left me with a great sense of hope. I remain optimistic we can move the region forward.



**Linda Fuline**  
**Superintendent, Summit County Educational Service Center**

I was very impressed with the development that has taken place in the city of Milwaukee. The time offered many opportunities for us to reflect on the strengths of our own Summit County area and begin to imagine the “what ifs.” A number of the educational ideas shared with us are already in progress in several of our school districts. We have a continuing need to enhance conversations among K-12 educational institutions, the business sector and government entities. The specific skill sets required by employers in our area are in need of further definition and sharing. I am confident the opportunity for improving these conversations will be enhanced as a result of the discussions that occurred during our invaluable visit.



**Robert Genet**  
**Barberton mayor**

During the trip, I recognized that each group told the same story on Sunday and Monday. They were promoting the water industry throughout the region. They continued to talk about the M7 (seven-county region) collaboration. By doing so, they have been able to include water in their education curriculum. This will add to the workforce needed in the future and will guide entrepreneurs to expand in the water industry. I believe we are more diversified than they are.

I realize the need for water will always be critical. In the urban core, they took the premium land and used it for residential development. In addition, the city took on the responsibility for storm water management and on-street parking to relieve the costs of industrial development. This is something every community in the region can learn from.



**Dr. Jay A. Gershen**  
**President, Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED); Greater Akron Chamber board member, Akron Tomorrow trustee**

The visit offered an opportunity for chamber members to observe and analyze best practices in economic development, urban land use, and talent development. The trip also created time to enhance useful relationships among members and to set the stage for bringing Greater Akron to the next level in company attraction, job creation, and community growth. Success will depend on the degree to which Greater Akron leaders focus on promising sectors, communicate a message that attracts and retains talent, concentrate on cluster development with regional entities, and develop an infrastructure to implement programs that will achieve desired objectives.



**Martin P. Hauser**

**President, SummaCare Inc.; Greater Akron Chamber investor**

The Inter-City Leadership Visit created a unique opportunity for me to join many of our community's leaders to study another community's successes while joining together in focused discussions about ways we can work together to build upon our area's many strengths.

My key "takeaways" include:

- To be successful, the community needs a common, shared, and consistent vision that can be embraced and articulated by our leaders
- Success depends on alignment, focus, and clear communication
- We need to promote the area's key strengths and enhance those strengths with our programs
- Current leaders have an obligation to encourage, support, and prepare the next generation of leaders
- We must have an attitude that reflects "our best days are not behind us - but are in front of us"
- Finally, nothing happens without strong, collaborative leadership



**David W. James**

**Superintendent, Akron schools; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

My big take-away from this experience is how we need everyone involved in promoting and supporting education. Why? It is the primary driver of our economic success. Looking at the history of Akron and Milwaukee,

geography and location played major roles in past success. In Akron, it involved the Cuyahoga River and the Ohio and Erie Canal; in Milwaukee, it involved Lake Michigan, the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic Rivers.

Today, however, we cannot solely rely on geography to foster success. We saw examples of how the sense of place is being transformed, recast, and made relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century needs. Milwaukee is becoming a center of water technology, in part based on past success in supporting the brewery industry. It is past success that is being used to solve today's challenges. This transformation is producing new opportunities for business and education. Both cities face the critical need for talent in the form of a highly trained workforce. Now, more than ever, we must improve the rate of students who go on to post-secondary education; link local businesses with our students, and improve our talent pipelines. We have made some success in this area, but more is required. My last observation is that the leaders from the major public and private organizations of a community are working together to promote success. Where else will you find that commitment? That is something powerful.



**David Jennings**  
**Director, Akron-Summit County Public Library.**

Learning about Milwaukee and how they have strived to re-invent their city, as we have worked to re-invent ours, was both energizing and thought-provoking. Seeing first-hand how others have responded to challenges often made me wonder, “Why not in Akron?”

Upon reflection, Milwaukee is ahead of Akron in some areas, but not as advanced in others. Their focus on promoting clusters of industry, particularly water technology, along with their recent downtown residential development, definitely made an impression on our group.

However, I think the longer-term benefits of a visit like this go beyond any specific ideas gleaned from Milwaukee; observing the efforts of another community makes us more open to possibilities and new approaches, and our community's leadership culture will be more prone to embrace and shape change rather than retreat from it.



**Eric Anthony Johnson**  
**Executive director, University Park Alliance**

The main point that came across is that with focus, alignment and communication among stakeholders working toward the betterment of the city, a community can make great strides in building a competitive city to live, work and play. Having been to Milwaukee over the years and to see what they have done in the past 10 years is incredible. I also think that the trip validated the direction we

are headed in Akron and that we have the elements to position the city and the region for a great future.



### **Joseph S. Kanfer**

**Chief executive and chairman, GOJO Industries Inc.; Greater Akron Chamber investor; Chair of Akron Tomorrow**

Entities, including communities, succeed best when they develop competitive advantages, that is, unique combinations of assets and activities that give them an advantage over others in a given field. Akron has the unique asset of a highly collaborative mindset which spans the public, private and non-profit sectors. We must pay attention to providing leadership and venues for this collaboration to blossom or it will be merely unfulfilled potential. ABIA (Austen BioInnovation Institute of Akron) is one such successful collaboration. Another idea which emerged on the trip is a “skunk works” where R&D teams from various companies work side by side, enriching each other. Another is bringing younger talent into common venues, supplementing our already good collaboration among executive leadership.



### **J. Michael Kolk**

**Partner in charge — Private Client Services, Cohen & Co.; Greater Akron Chamber Vice Chair; Talent, Executive Committee**

The trip to Milwaukee was eye-opening on many levels. We are not alone in our quest to successfully evolve from our historical core identity by focusing on our current and future regional assets. Milwaukee has much to be proud of and gave us high benchmarks to compare against. When measuring Akron’s achievements in this light, we fared quite well. We are benefited greatly by our collaborative spirit. The mayor and other community leaders have a clear passion for sharing the best ideas and enhancing the quality of the Akron region. The enthusiasm of our debriefing session was tremendous. A great way to re-energize!



### **Daniel Leslie**

**Managing director, Northwestern Mutual; Greater Akron Chamber Small Business Council member**

I have grown up and lived in Akron and the vicinity my whole life. I am an entrepreneur that has been building and growing a successful financial services firm in Akron for 16 years in partnership with Northwestern Mutual, one of Milwaukee's largest companies. This has given me a chance to see Milwaukee struggle, grow and prosper over the same number of years.

One of the things I have taken away from Milwaukee is the way they have engaged their young professionals. Said one Milwaukee businessman: "Young people want to make a difference and they want access, they want hope in the future."

Access in Akron is very challenging. After many years of working at getting a place at the table to contribute to the ideas and growth of our region, it feels very much like an old boys club. I have a lot of respect for the people I traveled with on this trip. Much of the great things going on are because of these 30 or so young people. It is odd, however that in my mid-30s, I am by my estimate 10 years younger than anyone on this trip and on average 20 years younger (with the exception of the Young Professional Network chamber employee).

This is a problem. It's hard to attract businesses without having a talent pool. We have a similar climate, region, parks, universities, hospitals, and arguably better than Milwaukee. They keep many more of their young people. Access and collaboration with young and veteran business leaders must take place. Let's use our veteran business leaders to promote the competitive advantages and opportunities our region has to offer. Let's get out of the board room and start creating experiences that will connect up-and-coming talent to stay in the region.

Other takeaways:

- Get business to entertain in Akron. Why doesn't Goodyear bring their dealers to Akron?
- Create partnerships between business, government, and philanthropists.
- Collaborate.
- Is health care really a cluster? It brings in little money from outside the region.
- We need more than one contractor, one developer, that gets all the work.
- Bring the rich people downtown.
- The park system is a major opportunity, most people outside the region don't know about it.
- Milwaukee's philanthropists don't just get shaken down and hand out money, they work on a legacy plan that leverages their giving.
- Akron is lacking in the sophistication of ideas local law firms and accounting firms are delivering.
- Can the University of Akron be a pioneer to get us out of the education bubble? Does a young entrepreneurial person really need a liberal arts education with \$50,000-plus in student loans? This is killing the entrepreneurial spirit like I and others had coming out of college just 15 years ago.



**Christine Mayer**

**Chief operating officer, legal counsel, GAR Foundation**

We saw many interesting places and amazing work in Milwaukee – all of which has its own inherent value. Yet to me the greatest value of seeing

these things was their ability to shed new light on what we have here in Akron. We have so many assets, so many strong collaborative relationships. With a small amount of incremental effort, we can sharpen our focus, distill our community's shared priorities, and tell a more compelling story about what the future holds for Akron. Such a shared story can be among a community's most powerful tools, as we witnessed in Milwaukee.



## **Vincent J. McCorkle**

**President and chief executive, Akron General Health System; Greater Akron Chamber board member; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

In many if not most communities, be they business organizations, governmental or civic, commitment to historical culture inextricably “eats” emerging strategies which aspire to create a new future. I left Milwaukee impressed with a sense of alignment and commitment among business leaders, city government officials, community based leaders and developers to a common vision of the future, with a laser-like focus on how to achieve that vision with an emphasis on rapid implementation.

Milwaukee has transformed its culture to enable, rather than “eat,” its strategy to reposition itself as a vibrant and leading midwest city.



## **Anthony O'Leary**

**Executive director, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority; chair, University Park Alliance Board**

Having clear focus on a limited number of business development goals and a clear and a thoughtful communication strategy is extremely important. The Water Council and the various linkages with schools and business are examples.

Other thoughts:

- Build on your strengths. Use the “cluster” concept of building on business and civic strengths.
- Historic preservation, while very difficult and expensive, adds to the city's uniqueness and sense of place.
- Having a natural resource like a Great Lake is very valuable and a draw for business and residential development.
- Citizen attitudes count and you need to address it -- not just to have a strong city but also to retain talent.

- Alignment and integration of goals, vision and business came up in a very consistent way. Planning is vital also.
- Having large corporations and major donors to art, culture and new projects are large advantages. This is harder in Akron.
- Use of technology to help speed up site selection process, information about available business incentives and labor force are important.
- Government has played an integral role in Milwaukee's redevelopment.



## **Donald L. Plusquellic**

**Akron mayor; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

(Mayor Plusquellic was traveling and in meetings after the Milwaukee trip. The following are excerpts from a discussion he had with reporter Betty Lin-Fisher reflecting on the trip.)

**Urban core:** It was very much worth going up there, especially for people who want to be leaders and have been from Akron from the private sector. They could see where they've done a successful urban core city downtown. Ours is a mixture -- we've got the downtown starting to move. We need to see additional development in the core around downtown -- specifically in the University Park Alliance area. I think we have a great story to tell, equally as great as Milwaukee. We don't have a big lake. What we do have is the canal and towpath. We have to play on the assets we have. I want to try to connect up walking paths as much as possible, to connect up every neighborhood through other parts of the city to link up to the canal.

**Their cluster/our cluster:** The emphasis they put on this water cluster was a great recognition of what a group of people that have a common interest in a particular area can do. We've done the same thing as a community with the Austen BioInnovation Institute.

**Engaging young people:** I don't think we've done enough with internships. I do think giving young people this connection to the real world really does help motivate them. Building upon internships is something I think will be a focus that has come out of this visit and discussion.

**Architecture:** I was struck from the beginning about when we first visited (the mayor and City Council went to Milwaukee several years ago) and reconfirmed in my mind that they kept more of the older buildings, unique buildings we could never build now. I think

they have done a better job of unique architectural design on many of their buildings. I need to reinvigorate the urban design commission to put some other people on there to really hone in with private developers to make sure their buildings are making statements.

**Discovery World/Inventure Place:** I could hardly stand walking through there, but Discovery World was magnificent. I recognize that Milwaukee is three times bigger than us, but our kids deserve, even if it's on a smaller scale, a hands-on science museum. They need to have fun learning and enjoying themselves like the hands-on museum that was in (the former) Inventure Place. It's an absolute crime that's not there and in some way we have got to bring that back. That's a goal of mine, to revisit that with these same business leaders, who when I've talked about it in the past, have rolled their eyes. Hopefully some of them will take on this advocacy.



### **Angela Presutti**

**Young Professionals Network director; Greater Akron Chamber**

Recognizing how important talent is to the continued vitality of any region is essential and Milwaukee has made great strides in all aspects of the talent initiative. The highlight of the visit for me was to meet and listen to Fuel's (Milwaukee's YP [Young Professional] group and one of the most successful YP groups in the country) executive director, Corry Joe Biddle, discuss the history of Fuel, their challenges and successes.

Like Milwaukee, we too work smart to highlight this region as a great place to live, work and play. As the YPN director, I'm fortunate to have so many champions among our community and business leadership who support our efforts. The YPN is growing every day and will continue to promote the region as a place young professionals can put down roots and achieve their life goals.



### **Luis M. Proenza**

**President, University of Akron; Greater Akron Chamber board member; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

This is a very fine way for the community to come together around the major issues that confront Akron as well as the opportunities and how we can together learn about what other communities are doing. Having done this in a number of other communities, such as Indiana, it is very valuable. Clearly here in Milwaukee we have seen the marvelous leveraging they have done of their natural assets with their urban living. That's one of the biggest lessons we'll carry forward. The other thing that is apparent or certainly hyped here is the degree of focus, degree of communication and differentiation they have brought to their community around water. Clearly that can translate in Akron to potentially at least polymers. That's an area where the world has hyped us in that regard. We tend to not fully understand polymers today because it's

much more diverse than just rubber or plastics. We have a huge opportunity to create a point of differentiation and focus around complexity and opportunities of polymers.

We certainly enjoyed the Discovery Place (a science museum centered around water) and how its been focused around a waterfront. It's very stimulating to see some ideas of what could we do with the canal if we really focused on that as a major natural asset to build around. Ideas begin to stimulate. The final point is after we visit a number of cities, we can abstract from that some of the things that are in common as opposed to things that are different. Rather than always focus on unique things in a community, we need to remember our community is different. It has a complexity of strengths and opportunities to build upon that are unique and can't be replicated simply because we think it's nice and neat.



**Russell M. Pry**  
Summit County executive

Education, economic development and efficient government set the goals and objectives of the greater Milwaukee community.

What I took away from the meetings was a sense of a community that understood that no individual organization could make the necessary changes to advance any of the three goals and that multiple groups understood their interdependence on one another to move the greater Milwaukee community forward.

As a next step, I would be very interested in sending a similar delegation of our young professionals and torchbearers to Milwaukee to learn a younger generation's perspective on the changes being made in Milwaukee.



**Robert P. Reffner**  
Vice president, Legal, FirstEnergy Corp.; past chair of the Greater Akron Chamber Board; Akron Tomorrow trustee

The trip reinforced key principles. First, we need an overarching context for what we seek to accomplish. We've developed the key jigsaw puzzle pieces (in urban redevelopment, talent and economic development). Do we agree on the picture on top of the box? Next, we need more communication even as to those already involved and broadened coalitions. The challenges and opportunities cross-cut the community and the region. We'll do better as we align more and connect more to the effort. Finally, there is a need for focus. What do we stand for? It's not a question of what we ignore but what we promote.

It was a great trip. The fellowship was the best part.



## **Thomas J. Strauss**

**President and chief executive, Summa Health System; past chair of the Greater Akron Chamber Board; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

I loved the interaction we had on this trip; To get a group of leaders like this that are committed enough to spend three days here has just been wonderful. We've all been very surprised by the development and focus and success of Milwaukee. I think the theme I've glommed onto is don't underestimate the possibilities. If you think about the focus they were able to achieve on their strengths of water, of place, of waterfront canal systems, the parks, the unification of that vision and the clarity of what they're trying to achieve has been absolutely amazing. Another point is the way leadership has aligned itself. The thing that struck me most is when we were visiting Barry Mandel's loft (a downtown developer who built a high-rise of multi-million dollar condos in downtown), a woman from the parks department after a death of a friend came there for respite between close friends. That shows the closeness. It's unbelievable.

On the subject of talent, we saw the idea of the Spreenkler (Talent Labs, pairs design students and young talent with emerging talent) and the BizStarts Milwaukee (an organization helping entrepreneurs develop investor-ready companies). The way they've engaged their youth and young professionals, for incubation, for socialization, for networking and learning and entrepreneurial creation, is unbelievable. They talked about a franchise. I would love to bring them to Akron to talk to our young professionals. There was the idea of the power of individual philanthropy helping the urban core. We saw a developer take on his own (the former Pabst brewery) project and the developer with urban living downtown (Mandel). How they took the risks and put their personal commitment to it was amazing.



## **Kirstin Toth**

**Senior program officer, GAR Foundation Chair, Board of Directors, Summit Education Initiative**

I valued the exchange with "folks just like us"- all of us just trying to do the right things for our communities. Their commitment to making their home a better place was real, as is ours. They've experienced the same political or philosophical battles as we have (conservative or progressive) and have approached them in similar ways. Here are my key takeaways:

- The intellect, commitment and passion of the key player(s) is important (like Julia Taylor, Greater Milwaukee Committee's president.) The capacity of a single person to affect real change cannot be underestimated.

- Focus, focus, focus in a shared goal is critical to long-term success. Everyone needs to be communicating the same messages across all groups.
- We have many assets just as Milwaukee does: large central corporate supporters; a central asset as a focal point (Cuyahoga Valley National Park); a spirit of personal philanthropy; an education reform support organization in SEI (like Milwaukee Succeeds.). Our urban schools are stronger, with less-fractured leadership and collaboration.
- What we don't have is a critical mass of business revenue and investment dollars, or philanthropic dollars on the scale of a Milwaukee (population 600,000+).

What the trip meant to me: we are a strong community but need to embrace other ideas and see other ways and models of operating, especially in the areas of traditional community and economic development. The UPA (University Park Alliance) genesis is important to model the possibilities. I also have a greater appreciation of the importance of Twitter and Facebook. I'm going to stop resisting and sign on, lest I miss out on the next generation of communicators and citizens!



## **J. Bret Treier**

**Partner, Vorys, Seymour Sater & Pease**

A brief summary of some lessons learned (or reinforced) from our Inter-City visit:

**Focus:** Have a focused collective vision for economic development that leverages our known strengths in polymers, BioInnovation and health care.

**Place:** Develop a unique sense of place through urban redevelopment efforts that capitalize on our key community assets, like being the front door to the Cuyahoga National Park.

**Education:** Continue innovative, collaborative ways to develop, retain and attract the talent needed to support thriving economic development, but ensure that career path training efforts include all levels of students (not just collegiate-bound), to stabilize our community and provide the full scope of resources needed to sustain economic growth.

**Be positive:** Discard regional negativity and Rust Belt mentality; embrace being a Great Lakes State with valuable resources and a sustainable future.

**Seize the opportunity:** With our community's collaborative spirit and leadership, we can develop a game plan that embraces these elements and capitalizes on the growing trend of 25-35 year-olds who are returning to urban areas that provide an attractive sense of place and economic opportunity



## **Maureen VanDuser**

**President and chief executive, Summit Workforce Solutions**

One hundred words cannot do justice to the whirlwind Milwaukee visit. Three thoughts resonate more than others. Success requires alignment and continuous realignment between and among the many entities doing economic and workforce development. Second, a significant component of alignment and a major contributor to success is frequent, ongoing and consistent communication between and among all these entities: education, business and government. Most important, as impressive as the strides and successes of Milwaukee are, I learned from my fellow travelers that our own economic and workforce development renaissance is already well under way. Within Akron and Summit County reside bit of the energy, enthusiasm, commitment and power needed to surpass the Milwaukee success.



## **The Rev. Curtis Walker Sr.**

**Akron school board president**

I thought this was a very rewarding trip, a very insightful trip. We learned a lot about synergy and working together. The key for me was the communication. Everyone was willing to communicate. Everyone knew what was going on and the message was clear. It evolved around water. They were creative in developing their urban area.

I really didn't see a clear relationship with the superintendent and school board. We found out later there had been splintering in their school board. It's very important they are cohesive. That erodes the base of kindergarten through 12.

What I would like to see Akron do is communicate better. We brought everyone here. We need to communicate better so we know what we're doing. We can work in concert. What do the businesses need from us (schools) to prepare students for the future with employment as the end goal?



## **Theodore F. Walter**

**Akron/Canton president, Fifth Third Bank; Greater Akron Chamber board member; Akron Tomorrow trustee**

The trip provided an opportunity to hear about best practices and the need to focus on core strengths. It highlighted the role and importance of an energized leadership team and the need to have a vision and act on that vision with leadership from the business community. The continued importance of education and the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and our workforce development need to be continued priorities. The trip also brought an appreciation for the great treasures we have

in our community such as: water resources, educational opportunities and the commitment of both political, business and not-for-profit professionals to continue to build our great community!



### **Jeffery A. Walters**

**Senior managing director, CBIZ Mayer Hoffman McCann; Greater Akron Chamber Board Vice Chair for Governmental Affairs, Executive Committee**

The primary thing I gained from the trip was the importance of capitalizing on the economic and community strengths within a region. It was interesting to see the similarities and differences. The tremendous schedule of meetings and presentations gave us a wealth of information in experiencing first-hand the challenges, successes, and failures of the city and the region. The presenters were forthcoming with the issues they faced, and the involvement and cooperation of the community leaders was apparent. It was striking to me that the interest and involvement by the community leaders of Akron that came together to make this trip a success is the same type of collaboration that has brought a great deal of success to Milwaukee.



### **Derran Wimer**

**Executive director, Summit Education Initiative.**

The trip to Milwaukee was incredibly instructive. Cooperation, collaboration, public/private integration, clearly articulated vision, focus, and civic energy are the descriptors I would use to illustrate what I learned. I believe that the hosts were equally impressed by the makeup of the Akron contingent that clearly demonstrated an excellent cross-section of leadership and a commitment to the city and its growth. Most, if not all, of these elements exist in Akron and we can demonstrate many comparable initiatives that have already positively impacted our city and region.



### **Bradley A. Wright**

**Partner in charge, Akron office, Roetzel & Andress LPA.; Greater Akron Chamber Board Vice Chair, At-Large, Executive Committee**

The trip to Milwaukee was a success for both Akron and Milwaukee. The collegiality and thoughtfulness shown by our civic and business leaders was impressive. There is a definite desire to see Akron prosper, be it through education or economic development. Milwaukee has focused its development on its main asset, water. Akron also has assets that could drive both economic development and quality of life. For

a city of Akron's size, we compete strongly with larger cities such as Milwaukee. We now need to take what was learned and apply it for the betterment of Akron.