

ROOM TO GROW

Pawtucket Foundation has ambitious agenda for the city

By DONNA KENNY KIRWAN

PAWTUCKET — To the members of the Pawtucket Foundation, “The Bucket” is always half full — never half empty. In fact, these days more than ever, they view the city of Pawtucket as having shaken off its derogatory nickname and brimming with exciting opportunities.

The Pawtucket Foundation was organized in 2001 by representatives of local corporations and institutions to apply the spirit and practices of “civic entrepreneurship” to the economic development of the Pawtucket/Central Falls community. The group represents the private business and not-for-profit sector in advocating for downtown, riverfront and “gateway” improvements in Pawtucket and to enhance the city’s image as a whole.

Jack Partridge, a Pawtucket native and attorney with the law firm Partridge, Snow and Hahn, founded the Pawtucket Foundation with Dan Sullivan, chairman and CEO of Collette Vacations. Partridge said he and other business leaders in the private sector had been discussing how more should be done to help promote economic development in the city. It turned out that Sullivan had been thinking along the same lines, and both men had approached Mayor James E. Doyle independently to ask “What can the private sector do?”

The mayor was enthusiastic about the idea, said Partridge, and out of these discussions, the Pawtucket Foundation was born. He said that he and Sullivan put the word out to 50 or 60 other business leaders, and, to their pleasant surprise, over 55 showed up at the initial meeting. “We told them, ‘We’re not sure where this is going,’ and then we asked everyone to put \$500 into a kitty to see if it would be feasible to set up a foundation to support economic development,” said Partridge. “We got a 95 percent commitment.”

With its seed money, the Pawtucket Foundation obtained legal status as a tax exempt organization, and hired its first executive director, Richard Davis, to help define and focus its mission and goals. It was obvious early on that the areas of concentration should be the city’s railway, highway and waterways and how to best utilize these advantages for economic development purposes, Partridge said.

Among the objectives established

by the Pawtucket Foundation are land use planning, examining business costs, transportation and parking, environment and amenities, government regulation, and enhancing visitor growth. Some of the ways the organization plans to achieve this is by fostering collaborative efforts between the private and public sectors, hiring consultants, obtaining grant money, and using sub-committees comprised of both Pawtucket Foundation members and non-members.

In July of 2009, the Pawtucket Foundation hired Thomas Mann as its new executive director after its first director, Richard Davis, stepped down to become president of the Downtown

resources totaling nearly \$1 million. The Pawtucket Foundation now has an endowment that will help to sustain its mission in perpetuity. Additionally, the board is exploring the possibility of creating an urban land trust to acquire and hold land donations, conservation and easements in key areas of interest in Pawtucket. He added, however, “Funding is always a challenge, and so we are always pursuing grant and other strategic funding opportunities in support of our mission.”

Mann said he sees the role of the Pawtucket Foundation as a “brain trust” to generate innovative ideas that support its mission. He added that the organization works hard to maintain a positive relationship with the business community, city administration, city council, non-profit sec-

“I think it’s extremely valuable to have an organization like our Foundation to serve as a conduit for collaboration. Since we are non-political, we can propose provocative ideas and openly facilitate dialogue without fear of retribution, re-election or reprisal.”

Improvement District of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Mann, who spent eight years in the Air Force as a Civil Engineer officer and logistics planner, is credited with bringing energy and a broad leadership approach to the Pawtucket Foundation in order to engage a larger, more regional audience.

“Clearly, the issues Pawtucket faces with transportation and economic development have a broad regional impact. Because of the need to have strong statewide and federal support for ambitious projects involving commuter rail, bus rapid transit and mixed use infill and redevelopment, we have got to be networking with all of the key stakeholders throughout Rhode Island and the northeast region,” Mann stated.

Mann pointed out that since 2001, nearly 200 businesses have provided important financial and in-kind

resources totaling nearly \$1 million. The Pawtucket Foundation now has an endowment that will help to sustain its mission in perpetuity. Additionally, the board is exploring the possibility of creating an urban land trust to acquire and hold land donations, conservation and easements in key areas of interest in Pawtucket. He added, however, “Funding is always a challenge, and so we are always pursuing grant and other strategic funding opportunities in support of our mission.”

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Pawtucket Foundation, “We hope to leverage the resources throughout the community to catalyze and build synergies to implement the projects that naysayers think improbable.”

Both Mann and Partridge noted that through the Pawtucket Foundation, they have tried to promote Pawtucket’s vital role as an urban center on a statewide level, making sure to invite the governor, congressmen, and legislators to its annual dinners and other key events. “We see that as part of our mission. To get people to understand that Pawtucket is a pretty vibrant place and there is a lot going on,” stated Partridge. For his part, Mann has tried to pump up excitement about pending projects with multi-media presentations that employ video, 3D computer animated renderings, and economic data to convey what he sees as “the vast potential of Pawtucket as an economic competitor in the Providence metro region.”

Partridge added, “I love Pawtucket. I spent most of my life here and I have very good thoughts about it all the time.” He recalled that at his first meeting with the mayor, Doyle had pointed out the old J & K mill visible from his office window and explained how it had just been purchased by a developer who wanted to turn it into residential lofts. “I remember the mayor saying ‘This has to be a success story,’” said Partridge. “I looked over at it and I had my doubts, but look what happened,” he noted, of the project that became the upscale Riverfront Lofts.

Dan Sullivan, who not originally from Pawtucket, noted that Collette has been in the city since 1918. “Pawtucket holds a very special place for myself and my company,” said Sullivan. “With the Pawtucket Foundation, we wanted to engage the business community, and we have had great support from businesses large and small.”

“We’ve been able to get close to 100 companies involved and it’s growing every year,” Sullivan added. He noted the wealth of talent among the Pawtucket Foundation members in diverse career areas that range from corporate and non-profit business leaders to lawyers, bankers, artists and designers, engineers, architects, and other highly regarded professionals.

“I love going to our meetings,” agreed Partridge. “There is always



something that happens.” He, too, said he is proud of what the Foundation has been able to accomplish so far and the ambitious projects that lie ahead. “I find it terrific to deal with these things. It’s exciting,” he stated.

In the coming year, the Foundation hopes to make significant strides with the proposal for a commuter rail stop in Pawtucket, the development of the Roosevelt Avenue mixed use district and opening the riverfront to better serve the public. Each of these projects will be outlined in the TIMES in a series that will run on the Monday business page.

As the city administration and private developers move forward with many of the planned projects, Partridge said it is more important than ever that the foundation stay true to its mission: “How can the private sector assist the city to make sure that economic development is part of the fabric?”

Mann said that because the Pawtucket Foundation is a public/private partnership, the organization is in a good position to spur these new initiatives that will change the face of the city. “We enjoy a very positive and supportive relationship with Mayor Doyle and his administration and we are not afraid to think outside of the box and propose radical ideas,” Mann stated. “Only a decade ago, many might have considered the notion of new mixed-use, multi-story buildings, a commuter rail stop, an iconic bridge and riverfront development in Pawtucket’s downtown a pure fantasy.”

Designing your company’s ‘customer experience’

Editor’s note: This is the second segment of an article that appeared on last Monday’s Business Page.

By LARRY GIROUARD

For the initial steps, I suggest you try the following:

1) Break the “Outcome” down into all the elements that have been identified and look at each one as a stand alone entity. To develop a list, have a 60 minute brainstorming session with your managers and employees and generate a list of customer needs, wants and complaints. You might have 30, or more, items on this list but it will represent a good starting point and a very large percentage of the actual “Outcome”.

2) Rank each element in the order of importance with respect to the ones that you feel are the most important to your customer.

3) Pick one of the key elements, like “on time delivery”, and begin to track and measure the reasons why you are late for each order, or request, over a period of time ... say 1-2 months. The important point here is that every order, or request, must be included in the analysis. (Note: You must first establish the criteria for when an order is late, and this criteria must be in line with your customer’s criteria)

Do the same for the other elements of the “Outcome”.

By the way, once you start measuring corporate performance levels, and listing the reason why something was not met, employees will automatically start paying more attention to their role in any specific element of the “Outcome”. When you think about it, employees control well over 85% of the “Outcome” or “Customer Experience”. As a result, they must be 85% of the solution. It cannot be forced on them by management or push-back is guaranteed.

Some elements of the “Outcome”

Part 2: Optimizing the business outcome

are more difficult to measure. For example, how does the receptionist answer the phone? One of my clients has given the receptionist the title, Director of First Impressions, and this person was trained in how to deliver “great phone”. It is not measured specifically, but it is addressed.

4) After a period of data collection you will begin to see patterns. For example, one company had issues with the length of time it took for them to get back to a customer with lead times for any order. It could take up to 2 weeks or more. They modeled the process of where the request went and the time that the request stayed in any one location. It was a very simple model. As they collected data they were able to define the key contributor(s) to the delay. Customer Service (CS) collected all the data because they owned the particular customer request.

It was initially explained to all employees the importance of getting back to customers quickly with answers to all their requests as part of the overall “Customer Experience”. Engineering was the bottleneck in this case and it really stood out. Now responses to lead time requests are well under one week, except for unusual circumstances.

Because this particular example was only a part of an overall program to improve the “Outcome”, there were many examples where other departments represented the bottle neck. Once a management team begins to model the elements of the “Outcome” in a very graphic manner, it is much easier for all the stakeholders to see the value of their role in optimizing the “Outcome”. Also, with historical measurements applied to each segment of the model, corporate performance and

performance improvement becomes more visible.

There is a visual process called “Value Stream Mapping” that has been used very effectively in organizations that have the real passion for continuous improvement.

While some business elements are more complex to model than the example presented, the approach is the same. Eventually, as all the elements are integrated together, you begin to get a visual representation of your business “Outcome” in real time, or close to real time.

I call this the Everest of business modeling because few companies ever have the resolve to follow through on modeling the complete “Outcome”, with all, or most, its elements. Changing business culture can be a herculean challenge. There are many reasons why it doesn’t get done, but if the CEO has the vision, commitment, humility and passion to see it though, the rewards are great.

The optimized ‘customer experience’ Real market differentiation

Step back for a moment and envision that the “Outcome” for your company has been modeled, measured, and optimized. Your company employees are tuned in to the measurements that frame that “Outcome”, and are using these recorded measurements as one of the tools to help direct their day-to-day behavior.

Your sales department is now utilizing the “Outcome” data as an integral part of their sales presentation. Your company collateral refers to the “Outcome” (“Customer Experience”), using historical data to present your corporate commitment to performance

excellence.

The image of your company in the market place is largely derived from the company’s ability to drive the “Customer Experience” to higher levels. Remember, it will be very rare for competition to utilize this same selling technique because few, if any, have brought measurement into their business culture as a vehicle to differentiate their product offering and value proposition. Your company would stand alone in the competitive field, taking the “top of the hill” because of your exceptional service level.

Based on your company’s historically measured performance, in time you will be able to make guarantees that will be the envy of your competition. Your sales team can sell with confidence because they know the performance data is real. They will resist the temptation to oversell because they will not need to.

Self-sustaining measurement culture

As mentioned earlier, bringing measurement into the business culture is a difficult process. Initial resistance from all, or most, employees will be high. That being said, with the resolve of the CEO and senior management, and empowerment of the employees to implement their input, measurement will slowly be embraced by both management and the employees if there is a clear “win” outlined for all involved.

For example, one win for the employees may be a bonus based on the profit/employee number. As the “Customer Experience” improves, corporate efficiency will also improve. The “Customer Experience” cannot improve without some proportional improvement in corporate efficiency.

As sales from the improved “Customer Experience” increases, it will do so without a proportional increase in the number of employees and, by default, the profit/employee will increase. Again, this represents one win for the employees.

If you accept the fact that modeling and measuring the “Customer Experience” (The “Outcome”) of your business is a common sense approach to start your corporate change process, congratulations! That is the first step, and you are on your way.

While measuring performance can be very intimidating, measuring the corporate “Outcome” is a much easier concept to embrace as the initial step because real teamwork between corporate functions will be required. The members of the cross-functional teams will work out the processes to optimize the “Outcome”. Solutions will come from the bottom up and, therefore, more sustainable. Also, with this level of employee involvement they feel much more like they are part of the team. This culture is one where their efforts are better recognized. Improved corporate efficiencies has a direct impact the lowering the stress levels among employees.

The CEO must encourage and allow this process to evolve through employee empowerment. You have heard the term “journey” used throughout articles and books written on the subject of change. The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award constantly describes the road to performance excellence as a journey. I have had the opportunity to be involved with many journeys and can attest to the fact that it is well worth the ride.

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