

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH GIL WHITE

People and Land (PAL) Leadership Council Member

Note: This is another installment in a series of interviews with PAL supporters and grant recipients working to restore Michigan to prosperity.

Q: As a Realtor, what do you see as the actions Michigan could take to begin a turnaround in the state's economy?

A: We have to help pension funds, foundations, lenders, and appraisers understand that the definition of live, work, and play is undergoing a significant change to a New Economy model. The places young people and even boomers want are different from the model we have followed for 70 years. We know how to do the sprawl, auto-dependent model of development well. We don't know how to do placemaking: incorporating elements such as cultural development, green building practices, flex space for entrepreneurs and small businesses, locavore activities, and walkability. Great opportunities are emerging for this kind of development.

Q: As a longtime member of the PAL Leadership Council, what encouraging signs do you see that Michigan is taking steps to promote a new kind of prosperity?

A: I see recognition that regionalism is the path to prosperity. The Grand Vision in Grand Traverse County, the work of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance, Northern Initiatives in the U.P., and the Lansing Economic Area Partnership, to name a few – are making strides. Engaging people regionally and not waiting for the state is yielding results.



Gil White

Q: In what ways do you believe that PAL's Six Pillars for Prosperity may be gaining some traction with thought leaders?

A: Michigan's recession has an upside. People are looking for new solutions encompassed by the Six Pillars. Sprawl has stalled. Shifting demographic and cultural trends are revealing new opportunities within the framework of the Six Pillars.

Q: Chris Leinberger said at the 2010 Michigan Land & Prosperity Summit that the near future promises a shift in population growth from the exurbs to the inner-ring suburbs and urban core areas. How is this happening?

A: The core distinction he was making is that baby boomers are not suddenly going to want to be urban core dwellers, but want the lower energy costs, nearby shopping, short commutes, walkability, and bikeability offered by the inner-ring suburbs. The New Economy workers love the urban core for its culture, energy, and entertainment.

Q: Given the current rank of Michigan at the bottom of the nation in economic development, what do we need to do to encourage economic growth?

A: We have great natural resources, which offer many quality-of-life opportunities to enjoy here. In recognizing the shift from a manufacturing economy to New Economy activities, we properly need to focus on our young entrepreneurs. However, we can't overlook the fact that the largest entrepreneurial group is the age 55 to 64 year-old boomers. Public policy needs to be supportive of all entrepreneurial age cohorts.

About Gil White

Okemos-based Realtor Gil White is a former president of the Michigan Association of REALTORS® and member of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council, and currently serves on the PAL Leadership Council.



Visit PAL at www.peopleandland.org

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PAL UPDATE

Building a New and Prosperous Michigan

Spring 2010



Successful regions in Michigan have **come together** with **one objective** – to plan for the kind of growth that would make them good places to live, work, and play.

STELLAR PRESENTERS MARK MICHIGAN LAND & PROSPERITY SUMMIT

Covering a wide-ranging agenda, a series of remarkable presenters and facilitators powered the April 28, 2010, Michigan Land & Prosperity Summit at the Michigan State University Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center. Hundreds of participants were treated to national, state, and local leaders addressing such important



Bill Rustem



Chris Leinberger

Michigan issues as green infrastructure, revitalization of metro areas, renewable energy, encouragement of entrepreneurship, new agricultural development policies, economic growth, and regional placemaking.

Hosted by the MSU Land Policy Institute and the Michigan Land Use Funders, the Summit focused on issues related to new ways of rebuilding Michigan prosperity. "I think the event accomplished what it set out to do," said Bill Rustem, co-director of People and Land. "We have to keep the drumbeat going on the importance of these issues in rebuilding Michigan. There were a lot of ideas and facts people could take away from it, such as Chris Leinberger's point that population is shifting from the suburbs and back to our cities, so that cities that are ready to be rebuilt – will be rebuilt."



Leinberger is a professor of the University of Michigan Graduate Real Estate Program and a Visiting Fellow at The Brookings Institution, and his remarks were just one of the primary threads that emerged from the several presenters. For example, Dan Kildee, former Genessee County treasurer and now president and CEO of the Center for Community Progress, spoke on the importance of "Turning Vacant Spaces Into Vibrant Places," the work growing out of his leadership in using land banks to turn around urban areas. And Greg LeRoy, executive director of Good Jobs First, provided insights on how urban areas can be prepared to take advantage of federal funding for recovery efforts.

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MICHIGAN'S BRAIN DRAIN MAY BE WANING

Recent studies suggest that Michigan's much-reported exodus of young college grads may be slowing down, and perhaps reversing.

In one study, called Spotlight Michigan, a group of Michigan State University (MSU) seniors partnered with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) to find out where Michigan grads may be going. The initiative surveyed more than 850 MSU students who were enrolled at MSU during the Fall 2009 semester about their attitudes toward getting a job in or out of the state. The bottom line: most of these graduates were not considering a job in Michigan.

The most likely reason is the perception that Michigan's job market is so bad that looking here would be a waste of time, according to Phil Gardner, of the Collegiate Employment Research Institute. Those perceptions may be the result of unrelenting media coverage of Michigan's lack of jobs, added Gardner. He says that 65 percent of Michigan college

graduates are employed in the Great Lakes states. "There are opportunities here, but certainly not enough for everyone. Hopefully we can generate new employment options for young people that haven't moved very far out of state," Gardner said.

Gardner also said that the picture is really not so bleak for some university grads. He pointed out that the big state universities attract lots of out-of-state employers. But students of so-called "commuter schools" like Wayne State University and Oakland University are more often local, and they attract in-state employers.

Brenda Paine, assistant director of career services at Oakland University, finds that many of its graduates are staying in Michigan to work. "Although teaching is tough right now, a large volume of graduates' jobs are in health care, engineering, computer, accounting and finance."

Ron Kent, director of career services at Wayne State, said that 87 percent of Wayne State's grads find a job in the state.

In contrast to the Spotlight Michigan findings about MSU grads, Kelley Bishop, MSU's career services director, sees evidence that as other states catch up to Michigan in woeful economic performance, the "brain drain" from other states will reverse that trend in Michigan. "It's like the rest of the tight job market caught up with Michigan," he said.

He points to a 2009 survey sent out to nearly 6,000 MSU new graduates which found that 59 percent planned to stay in state. The year before, it was 46 percent. He says that this is not a statistical anomaly, because surveying that many grads provides more reliable data than does surveying fewer than 1,000.

Bishop sees development of emerging new industries such as information technology in the Lansing area, biotechnology in Ann Arbor, and medicine in the southwestern portion of the Lower Peninsula as reasons for optimism.

VITAL SIGNS OF WEST MICHIGAN ECONOMY SHOWING PROMISE

Along with the rest of the state, the health of West Michigan's regional economy has not fully recovered but many of its vital signs are promising. On April 27, at the Pinnacle Center in Hudsonville, the West Michigan Strategic Alliance (WMSA) held its annual State of the Region conference to unveil its 2010 West Michigan Vital Signs report before an audience of government officials, regional partners, and other thought leaders from the region's eight counties.

First reported out in 2007, the Vital Signs are a set of agreed-upon indicators used to measure trends in economic prosperity, environmental integrity, and social justice. In 2007, there were 15 indicators; today, 18. These indicators measure the West Michigan region against 26 peer regions in the U.S. with similar population and a similar multi-county/multi-city structure, as well as against Michigan as a whole.

Greg Northrup, president of WMSA, explains that the Vital Signs help build awareness and focus conversation about ways to improve prosperity and enhance quality of life in West Michigan. "It's been a four-year journey," he said, "but we are seeing that more people and leaders understand the importance of data in allocating resources. The approach is starting to get legs."

This year, the Vital Signs included 2015 achievement targets and key drivers for the indicators, which were developed by the Regional Indicators Technical Group with considerable input from 150 to 200 regional stakeholders. These targets and drivers were developed through several meetings held to re-evaluate the indicators and consider new sources of data.

The economic prosperity indicators for the region were mixed, as one might expect with the entire state struggling. But the region ranks 6th in self-employed

professionals, suggesting positive trends in entrepreneurship. Northrup feels this could improve considerably with a regional boost in educational achievement, which currently ranks West Michigan 15th among peer regions.

"Our region is becoming more aware that we need to continue to improve in order to attract and retain young people," said Northrup, pointing out that the 2007 Vital Signs sparked WMSA to develop an Internships Initiative, which has created more than 500 internships, to date, for young professionals in West Michigan. "Just recently, Priority Health created 17 new internships, which is the kind of commitment we welcome."

Other indicators that concern Northrup are negative trends in income disparity and housing cost burden, especially for minority populations, even though other social justice measures are keeping pace with best-in-class regions. In addition, employment change continues to slide into negative numbers, making West Michigan the worst of the peer regions and even slightly worse than the state as a whole. These are areas the region realizes it must address. "We have to do better," says Northrup. "And we can, with a concerted effort."

Among the bright spots for West Michigan are many of the indicators for environmental quality and quality of life, which place it in the top 12 or better of the 26 peer regions. Several WMSA projects, including work on green infrastructure, already target these areas of strength. These must continue to improve, Northrup says, to bring people and businesses to West Michigan. "We already believe that our quality of life is appealing to young professionals, and we have set several targets to enhance what we have here in both urban and recreational environments." You may view the report by visiting <http://www.wm-alliance.org/publications.php>.

FRESH VIEWS PROMOTE UPPER PENINSULA

Innovative thinking and reaching out to engage young people allows us to see that they do have roles to play in shaping Michigan's economic development strategies. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in a partnership between Northern Initiatives, a PAL Regional Prosperity Initiative grantee, and the Great Lakes Center for Youth Development (GLCYD). The result is a collection of youth-produced slideshow videos that capture the words of young people and the images they photographed of their favorite Upper Peninsula places.

In the summer of 2009, GLCYD partnered with youth-serving organizations to engage small groups of youth aged 8 to 18 to choose the places they most cherish, and then shoot and edit the images and add their own words to express their feelings. Linda Remsburg, GLCYD Youth Development Associate, facilitated the project. The partners are

Alger County MSU Extension, Girl Scout Troops 5126 and 5296 of Gwinn, Luce County 4-H, Superior Watershed Partnership, and the U.P. Children's Museum.

The videos are stunning tributes not only to U.P. locations, but to the minds and eyes of youth and their deep sense of place. The videos also are helping to spur economic development in the U.P. by promoting tourism.

"The young people were so proud that they were able to express themselves in such a way that promoted the Upper Peninsula so positively," reported Judy Watson-Olson, president of the GLCYD. "Most of us don't get the chance to stop and look around as often as we should, or as much as would be healthy. This project allowed these young people to step back, and look, and help us see what they saw."

"When you watch the videos, you can see the soul, the energy, and the inspiration that these children had. What was surprising was how the images show how their special places give them a sense of serenity."

You will agree, and find some serenity yourself, by watching the videos, which now also are on YouTube, at the GLCYD website:

www.glcyd.org/youthresearch/land_i_love_project.php



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"It was apparent to me that the participants in this Summit understand the issues now, far better than just a few years ago when we began addressing the connections between land use and Michigan's need for a new kind of prosperity," said Dr. Soji Adelaja, co-director of People and Land and director of the MSU Land Policy Institute. "And it's important to appreciate that now we have many partners working in their own ways on a similar agenda, like the Center for Michigan."



Dr. Soji Adelaja

Adelaja also pointed out the relevance of speakers' assertions that federal money is available for rebuilding ready communities. "The timing is extremely critical. Many of our cities are 40 to 50 percent down in real revenues from where they were ten years ago. Next year - 2011 - will likely be the last year we will see a robust federal budget because stimulus dollars will be gone," he said.

"Perhaps the best thing our prosperity movement can do right now for Michigan communities is to help them be ready to get access to federal funding while it's still available."

For complete information on the Summit and speaker presentations, visit <http://2010michsummit.org>.



Marsha Smith, who helps lead the PAL-supported Grand Vision project in Grand Traverse, presented the Land Use Leadership Excellence Award to Matthew P. Cullen, President and CEO of M-1 RAIL and President and COO of Rock Ventures LLC, for his dedicated work on the M-1 rail plan and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. The Land Use Leadership Excellence Award is given annually at the Summit in recognition of the highest level of performance in the area of land use.