

Can we shape our own destiny as a community? Or is our future outside our control?

One of the most important learnings from the Visioneering Wichita's Metro Leadership visit to Jacksonville, FL. was we can – and must – shape our own future. It takes vision, hard work, risk, teamwork and long-term thinking.

Those sound like a simple recipe for community success, but any person who has participated in making a community better, knows how hard the work can be.

Jacksonville shared the following lessons with our group of volunteers:

- It is vital to have elected and private leaders that value the long-term vision of what needs to happen now to make a community great 10 and 20 years in the future. These pro-active private and public sector forces must be marching to the same “drum beat.”
- Their community has developed the mindset that money should never get in the way of a great idea. We heard stories about businesses pitching in quickly to launch new efforts, and public entities advocating for the right public investment in infrastructure.
- Jacksonville moved forward when they claimed their own identity separate from their formidable in-state competition, which they call TOM - Tampa, Orlando and Miami. Jacksonville now has both the attitude and actions to take their rightful place among significant in-state competition.
- They recognized their windows of opportunity and took full advantage of them. Sometimes those windows are from economic growth and others are from economic downturn. One of their windows came when a mayor galvanized region-wide support for investment in Greater Jacksonville's long-term future.
- A group of unified business leaders can push hard at the right time with the proper resources. Same with a group of elected leaders. If those two groups work together, a community can achieve anything to which it sets its mind.
- Jacksonville developed a true appreciation for their community's assets. For too long, they had an inferiority complex about what they didn't have. They finally realized what they did have, including an ocean, diversified industry and a good workforce. They capitalized on what they did have, rather than longing for what they did not possess.

The progress “drum beat” in Jacksonville is being successfully played by multiple groups and partners in their community. They, like us, have come to the recognition that progress is about bringing together well-meaning people and collectively building and implementing forward-thinking plans that advance everyone’s welfare. Critics of progress will exist in every community and it is the responsibility of visionary leaders and citizens to listen to all relevant opinions, while holding true to the responsibility of putting their community’s “best foot” forward.

Jacksonville has been making a city-to-city visit for 27 years. This was our second. We are building our long-term vision and belief that we can control our own destiny. We have much to celebrate from recent successes and much yet to learn. Join us in the hard, important work of building our future. Our greatest years are ahead!

Bryan Derreberry is President and CEO of the Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce.