

The Growing Need of Collaboration in Uncertain Economic Times

Thank you, Pat. I appreciate that kind introduction.

I would like to personally congratulate the 46 employees from Summit County who have been nominated for an Employee of Distinction Award.

I also admire the management style of the employers who have nominated a member of their staff for this impressive award. You too are wise to express your gratitude through this public forum. Best-selling author and motivational speaker, Bob Nelson, would also approve of your kind-act. He once stated, "People may take a job for more money, but they often leave it for more recognition."

In this economy, for many of the top executives in attendance today, a heartfelt sign of appreciation is all they have to offer. A factor, I think brings more spirit to this celebratory occasion.

The award winners here today have shown loyalty, dedication and motivation, assisting their employer through these difficult economic times. You are partners for success with co-workers, employers and you know how to collaborate with others and network within the community for the better good.

Personal partnerships have proven to benefit the overall function of a workplace and collaboration between local municipalities, community organizations and private businesses have proven to be equally beneficial by eliminating duplication of services, saving tax dollars and serving more citizens at a time when we need to watch every penny in our budgets.

According to Morten T. Hansen, author of the book *Collaboration*, there are three areas of potential upside in business: better innovation, better sales, and better operations. In a government and non-profit context, these areas can be thought of as new services, greater client satisfaction, cost reduction and a better run organization.

With this in mind, the County of Summit and Goodwill Industries are truly keeping with Hansen's ideals by reducing costs and providing new services through collaboration. My Department of Job and Family Services currently partners with Goodwill Industries to operate the Employment Resource Center at The Job Center on Tallmadge Avenue in Akron. The Employment Resource Center provides free services to anyone seeking a new or better job. The center provides a link to training, education and employment opportunities in one customer-friendly system that brings job seekers and prospective employers together.

More specifically the demographics being served by the Employment Resource Center include: the un-employed, the under-employed, the dislocated, the downsized, those new to the workforce and citizens with disabilities.

In 2008, the Employment Resource Center served 9,660 job seekers. Through the resources of this center, 80% were placed in employment positions and 81% of those individuals were retained after their first 90 days. Overall, in one year, our collaborative effort put \$19.5 million back into our local economy. And more importantly, enabled our citizens to purchase food, provide housing and clothing for their families.

While these statistical comparisons can be viewed as somewhat of a sterile analysis of the significance of the success of the center, we must realize that each figure has a face. For instance:

One of our community relations specialists recently informed me of a conversation she had with a fifty-five year old citizen who had never been on a job interview before!

For years, he supported his family by operating a drive-thru beverage store he inherited in west Akron. Due to the lackluster economy, he was recently forced to close the business that supported his wife and two children for over twenty-years.

After discussing his situation with a case worker at the Department of Job and Family Services, he made a visit to the Employment Resource Center. It was there that he participated in videotaped mock interviews, attended educational workshops and prepared a cover letter, a resume and a list of references.

In the end, the services offered at the ERC led him to secure a position in our local workforce.

In addition to the Employment Resource Center, my staff has developed numerous community partnerships to secure employment opportunities for citizens. The County Executive's Office has also worked in collaboration with the Summit County Port Authority, the City of Akron, the State of Ohio, the federal government and members of the private business sector to retain the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company's World Headquarters in Summit County; as well as the new state of the art Bridgestone Firestone Technical Center. Together these collaborative efforts retained over three thousand jobs in Summit County.

This past summer, the County sponsored a Summer Youth Training and Work Experience program using federal dollars for area youth and collaborated with:

- Akron Public Schools
- Akron Urban League
- East Akron Community House
- J.O.G.
- YES - Youth Employment for Success Program.

As a result, 900 area youth, ages 14 -24 received training and paid work experience opportunities. This work readiness training program allowed our youth to learn valuable work skills while earning a wage to better prepare them for future employment. The invisible partners in this program are the hundreds of worksites that gave our youth the opportunity to work –

many that are here today – especially Goodwill Industries – so thank you very much – you may be invisible to most, but certainly not to me!

I know Goodwill Industries of Akron is no stranger to the spirit of collaboration. And I applaud you, Nan Ellis McClenaghan, President of Goodwill Industries.

For years, this non-profit workforce agency has worked in collaboration with the following establishments to achieve their basic goal of helping citizens prepare for, find and retain employment:

- The Girl Scouts
- Living Hope Church
- Automated Packaging Systems
- Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board United Way
- The County of Summit

Goodwill knows the importance of partnerships and not only talk the talk, they walk the walk.

Collaboration is not a new concept and it is more than a buzz word. That's why I meet on regular basis with our county levy agencies; MRDD, ADM, Akron Zoo, Akron Summit County Library, Children Services and Metro Transit and Metro Parks. We put our eight heads together, discuss ways we can eliminate duplication, share employees such as health care and assist one another in cross marketing.

Recently, a collaboration of more than 40 social service agencies dedicated to early childhood has joined to concentrate on a new initiative, *First Things First*. This early childhood initiative will create a comprehensive early child care and education system for our youngest citizens, focusing on system-building so that our county will be better positioned to seize opportunities to leverage state and federal investments in the future. Summit County Family and Children First Council is coordinating the agencies that will initiate the development of an operational plan, create a local inventory of public and private programs for young children and gather community stakeholders to develop a comprehensive early care and education system plan for Summit County by the end of 2010. We are expecting over 100 citizens to play a role in this initiative.

Not all collaborations have to be big; each of us can collaborate with just one agency and make a big difference. By donating a piece of furniture, an article of clothing or a used car, you become a partner with Goodwill and become part of the basic premise of Goodwill Industries' cycle of operation.

- Community members donate their usable goods
- The goods are sold in retail stores
- The proceeds from the retail stores help fund employment and training programs
- Through those programs people find employment; and
- Income earned through their employment helps stimulate the local economy

This business plan, coupled with their extensive list of community partnerships – including you, has allowed Goodwill Industries of Akron to prosper in Summit County. For instance, today's luncheon proceeds from this event go towards the Elizabeth Clark Emergency Fund, which assists individuals who are facing an emergency situation or financial hardship and are not financially able to secure basic household goods or clothing for themselves and their family.

In today's tough economic times, I am confident we will continue to build new partnerships, using our available resources smarter than ever and working together more creatively and more efficiently. Now more than ever, we must reach out and bring together people, programs, ideas and funding. I do see the light at the end of the tunnel and I know because of our exceptional workforce, dedicated community leaders and solid government, we will be okay until then...and in the near future, we will be greater than were we before.

The County of Summit has been a pioneer in collaboration and creative thinking. Twenty-nine years ago, the citizens of our county supported the change to a Charter form of government which has allowed our county to merge offices, collaborate more freely with other agencies, non-profits and governments and streamline services. Combining elected offices has also saved tax dollars by eliminating duplication of services and reducing staff. Every 5 years, a committee of citizens is appointed to review our charter and find news ways to enhance our government structure. Our 2009 Charter Commission has completed its review and submitted to County Council a change to consolidate and transfer the power and duties of the County Engineer to the County Executive and his Department of Environmental Services. This merging of services will do exactly what the charter was designed to do...stop duplication of services, streamline county

government and save tax dollars. This county issue will appear on your November ballot and I strongly support its passage.

Thank you for allowing me to be part of this wonderful celebration. I have said many times that we are lucky to live in Summit County, where our citizens give generously to support those less fortunate and where leaders understand the importance of working together through innovative collaboration for the greater good.

Congratulations to all the award winners and to Goodwill Industries. Thank you for all you do for our community and our citizens. Today, you remind me how lucky we are to have such a dedicated workforce in our community.

Looking out into the audience, I see so many familiar faces and know of all the good you do for our community. Let me end by thanking each and everyone of you for making Summit County, truly the highpoint of Ohio.

Thank you.