

Central Florida: A Legacy Community

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Like the spendthrift nephew, Central Florida has been living the good life, off the inheritance of sunshine, citrus and tourists. The windfalls of the past have provided modern day Central Florida with unbridled growth, a “world class” brand, and irrational exuberance that the future will be as effervescent as the past. As we enter into the “season of giving and thanks” we must ask ourselves, “*what if*” we commit to nurturing our civic capacity, for individuals, businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations, to take our inheritance and build a legacy community for the future. What role does philanthropy and volunteerism have in building civic engagement and facilitating legacy decisions?

We can not even begin to think about a legacy for Central Florida without first diversifying our economy, improving our educational system and strengthening our families. In the most child centered place in the world, our children and families are not achieving “world class” success. Too many of our children are not properly clothed, nourished, sheltered, or educated. We must find the resolve and resources to address these issues. The well being of our children, families and Central Florida are inextricably linked.

If we are however, to create a legacy community, where decisions are viewed with a 50 year lens, we need to find a way for individuals, businesses, governments and nonprofit organizations to engage in vibrant, meaningful and realistic action to build our legacy. I offer up my prescription, for Central Florida to become a legacy community, for your critical review.

Individuals must be encouraged to volunteer and to contribute to their favorite charity. Philanthropy and volunteerism still remains an efficient way for business and government to understand the people’s desire for a better tomorrow. We must also require Florida history and civics to be taught in our schools. Civic engagement can only be effective if individuals know the history of their community and know how to effect change.

Businesses in Florida can do more. If businesses would commit just 1% of their pretax profits to corporate philanthropy, a little could mean a lot for the sunshine state. No business can prosper in communities that are struggling with social, educational and health concerns. Corporate philanthropy is not banquet tables or charity golf tournaments. Businesses should also invest in employee volunteer programs, because the lessons learned in serving community organizations, promote enhanced leadership skills in the workplace.

Government must do no harm. The regulatory and enforcement powers of government can stifle community engagement. Central Florida elected officials should issue a

statement acknowledging the right and responsibility of nonprofits to inform and advocate on behalf of their cause. Government should also provide incentives for individuals and businesses that contribute to charity or improve our community through volunteerism. Finally, government should not over estimate what philanthropy can do in a time of dramatic government cutbacks. Philanthropy can enhance and engage our pathway to being a legacy community, but it can not pay for needed services which government declines to pay for in the no new tax environment.

Nonprofit organizations and foundations need to be more accountable. As private organizations, clothed with a public responsibility, the currency of the nonprofit sector is trust. It takes years to build a reputation of trust and as we have seen with some local and national nonprofits, it only takes a moment to loose it.

Communities of the 21st century will become legacy communities, for well planned economic development, intellectual reputation and innovation, strong families and by nurturing civic engagement through philanthropy and volunteerism. Philanthropy can not meet the total unmet needs of our community, but it can be the cornerstone to our building a legacy community, in our hearts, in our economic decisions ,in how we are governed and how we provide for generations yet unborn