

Scranton: Northeast Pennsylvania's Economic Growth Engine (Part Two)



(Continued from yesterday's Part I below)

I asked Mayor Doherty if the population decline in Scranton was a concern and was he focused on trying to reverse it. The mayor said the population is growing and becoming more diverse. There are now two dozen languages being spoken in the [Scranton School District](#) and over 70 ESL teachers. When the mayor took office ten years ago there was one ESL teacher in the school district. I recently read that the [Scranton/Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area](#) is the least diverse of any metropolitan area in the United States over 500,000 people. It would seem this may be changing.

We talked about the significance of what having a medical college and possibly a law school would mean for Scranton. Bringing in and retaining college educated people will help stop the "brain drain" and grow a population with more disposable income. This in turn fosters economic development and reduces crime. Medical schools and law schools bring a certain amount of prestige to any city lucky enough to have one. Perception is a hard thing to change. These types of accomplishments will tangibly demonstrate that Scranton is not a rust-belt, blue-collar, post-industrial casualty. Instead, Scranton has pulled itself up by its bootstraps and seeks to reclaim her proud heritage and rightful place as an economic powerhouse in Pennsylvania.

With a new governor in Pennsylvania things will most likely change. Ed Rendell was a friend to Scranton and poured \$140 million into the city for economic development. Governor Corbett is still an unknown, only just taking office. Many who received funding from Rendell are worried that money might be harder to come by under Corbett. The good news from Scranton is private sector funding for economic development has reached a level that will sustain Scranton in the event that money from Harrisburg dries up.

One of Mayor Doherty's mottos is "invest in yourself". Two examples of this are the restoration of the municipal building lobby and fixing the broken "Scranton The Electric City" sign that is perched atop on of the city's taller buildings (pictured above). The mayor feels strongly about the message neglect, disrepair, messy, dirty and cluttered can send to residents and visitors. The first-floor lobby area in the historic Municipal Building was cluttered with soda/snack machines and was in need of a major spruce up. The mayor did just that. (While I was waiting outside the mayor's office, I took a picture of the lobby because it was so impressive – see Part I photos). The "Scranton The Electric City" sign had been broken for decades. Now the sign lights up every night and makes a positive statement about the Scranton of the present, while honoring the city's past accomplishments.

Having frequent events is an important tool Scranton uses to promote itself, attract tourists and prospective residents. Scranton has a huge list of events like First Night, St. Patrick's Day Festival (3rd largest in the U.S. and draws 150,000 people), La Festa Italiana (draws another 150,000 people), Komen for the Cure (10,000 people), Steamtown Marathon (2,500 people), Scranton Jazz Festival and the Pages and Places Book Festival. These events are helping to make Scranton a "destination".

My last question to Mayor Doherty was "What has been your greatest challenge?" His answer was "changing the way people think". People need to believe that things are possible instead of falling into the "it can't be done here", "it will never work", "we can't afford it", "we never did it that way before" and the litany of excuses to maintain the status quo. The status quo is why Scranton hit bottom and had 22 empty buildings in its downtown.

Mayor Doherty has a vision for Scranton and is undeterred by criticism and negativity. Nor is he content to rest on his laurels. He always has future projects on the back burner and showed me some of them while we walked. The mayor is taking the revitalization of Scranton one project, one building at a time.

I will share one last thing Mayor Doherty said to me, which is important to always remember. These things take time. It took seven years to get to the Connell Building project completed. Construction took less than one year. All the planning, committees, red tape etc... took six years. Rome was not built in a day and neither will Scranton (or any other city) be magically revitalized. The mayor has accomplished all these things over **ten** years. It takes a dedicated team of people to make all this happen. It also takes someone like Chris Doherty to lead the team with a positive, can-do attitude, a never give up mentality and most of all a healthy dose of patience.

The Electric City has a bright future and is poised to again become one of Pennsylvania's most vibrant and important cities.





Roy's Rant- For Your Information

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