



Contributors

Ronald Machtley: Bryant teams up with Smithfield schools

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Ronald Machtley

AT A TIME when the business coin of the realm is “innovation,” we would do well to look “outside the box” for ways to provide strategies and visions for our communities who must provide affordable education and other services for their citizens. As we consider the traditional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for strategic planning in our communities, what becomes immediately apparent is the opportunity to partner with our statewide colleges and universities, which are not only strengths but also unique resources of competitive advantage.

Though the U.S. educational plan, No Child Left Behind, signed into law Jan. 8, 2002, looks for accountability in educational outcomes, it is nonetheless a remedy imposed by a government distant from the local community where the education of students has historically been based in the U.S.

In Smithfield, we think that a new community-based solution is possible. By joining the resources of both the local educational system and the local university, Bryant, we can create a new paradigm that both helps students who need support in attaining the No Child Left Behind standards, and at the same time accelerate superior students’ education with Advanced Placement courses that can eliminate up to one year of later college tuition.

In this model, coordinated by our experienced superintendent of schools, Robert O’Brien, Bryant students and committed and gifted university and Smithfield schools faculty and staff can collaborate creatively in meeting the local K-12 educational needs, resulting in a world-class educational system.

In addition, local economic development will benefit by meeting industry needs with a trained workforce. The powerful partnerships between Stanford University and Silicon Valley firms or those of biotech firms on the Route 128 Corridor with Boston universities stand as two good examples of what is possible.

Developing enhanced local economic, cultural, and social opportunities through the collaboration of community partners — without robbing funds needed for vital community services — is critical for today’s tax-strapped cities. Local institutions must break outside their traditional boxes and collaborate to enhance the community’s reputation and cultural resources.

We are optimistic that the Town of Smithfield and Bryant University are at the threshold of an exciting experiment in educational collaboration. Combine this with Smithfield’s good fortune of attracting companies such as Fidelity (whose current expansion facility is the largest in Rhode Island), and you can see why we believe that Smithfield’s future is limited only by a lack of strategic willingness to think innovatively

and collaborate to build an exemplary community. As the Town Council begins this strategic direction we look forward to sharing lessons learned and measured results with other communities that are blessed with similar educational resources.

Ronald Machtley is president of Bryant University, in Smithfield.