



10/17/07

Dear Roger and Vicky,

THANKS for yesterday. The proposed brand: "The West's Learning Center for the Arts" is grand.

Although I've been to each of your public presentations here, yesterday, I brought my wife, Via, and Luke, a neighbor - both had input during the feedback period - but neither had been to any of your previous meetings. I wondered what their thoughts would be. We walked away from your presentation all thinking that you and your team had listened to Helena well - not only to the feedback you received - but also to your experiences elsewhere. You took a tremendous amount of data and brought a proposal that does give Helena a unique brand. Note, this is what you did so well - it doesn't feel like we've been branded - it does feel like we've been listened to. You have done what the words in Vicky's bio say: you *excel at discovering the hidden gems and intangible characteristics that give a community its individual character - its sense of place.*

The IR article today put it this way: *"It feels good to me," said Matt Cohn, Advantage Helena chairman. "It takes so many of the attributes that we love about our town and makes them stronger. It's not creating something that we're not. So in my mind it's a good direction.*

Again, THANKS.

For nearly a year, I've been asking people why they love Helena. When you talked about the "*intellectual bent of the residents,*" that resonated - although I've never heard anyone articulate that before. Our family moved here last November from Cary, NC. We had lived there for 18 years. Cary is known for its explosive growth (25,000 to @ 100,000 in 25 years) and for being a bedroom community to the Research Triangle Park. According to the Cary Chamber of Commerce, it has attracted more PhD's per capita than anywhere else.

So, we are accustomed to being around those with an "intellectual bent." What sets Helena apart from Cary is a pervasive sense of community. To manage growth, Cary opted for being policy driven. Classically, one of the proper uses of the "law" is the "right ordering of society." But, to have a community, you need more than "policy" - you need neighborliness and brotherly love. Helena still has those. We need to encourage that dynamic here too.

As I thought about your proposal, it also sounded good because we are made to take dominion of this world. A hands on educational experience is part of whom we are - but in this age of isolation (TV, computer, cell phone, ipod) we can easily neglect such opportunities. I've seen communities excel that invest in education.

One such community is Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, MO. I had the privilege not only of graduating from Covenant - but also serving on its board. One reason that Covenant is a thriving seminary is its link to Francis Schaeffer - a man who died over two decades ago. However, the unique way he engaged culture and sought to love God with his mind have impacted many. The Francis Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Seminary - <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/apologetics/fsi.asp> - as well as L'Abri Fellowships

(study centers named after the center Schaeffer founded in Switzerland <http://www.labri.org/>) around the world continue to prosper. It may be that they would look into establishing a study center here. I will ask.

I like the proposed slogan: "Your Creative Place." By the way, when I went to the link for L'Abri, I saw this quote from Schaeffer: "*Art is a reflection of God's creativity, an evidence that we are made in the image of God.*"

When I got home last night, I e-mailed a young (35 years old) and gifted artist, TJ Lynde. TJ is a painter. TJ's father, Stan, is an institution here in Montana. TJ is also a husband and a father of two young children (4 and 2). TJ and his family moved to Helena from Billings during April, 2006. They love Helena. After coming here, TJ started an artist critique group with his good friend, Josh Elliot. Now, more than a dozen artists gather once a month to encourage each other and evaluate each other's work. TJ in particular is gifted at articulating what is happening in a work of art. I've attended before and it is very enlightening. So I wrote TJ and asked: *Would you and your art critique group be willing to move to a larger venue - to let a general audience observe your critiques and learn to understand art better as a result?* I wasn't at all sure of how he would respond. Today he wrote: *I would run it by the group first, but I think that would be a SUPER idea, Steve!* That's potentially very good news.

With the Roman Catholic connections that Helena has, maybe Sister Wendy could come (if her health is sufficient) and make a documentary about the art in the Cathedral - or elsewhere.

Roger, as Via, Luke and I were walking out of the presentation room, I recalled your Emerson quote: "*Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*" We agreed that you have it. I asked them if they knew the origin of "enthusiasm." It comes from two Greek words: "en" + "theos" (God). As I wrote to you last January, God builds and rebuilds cities (Ps. 69:34-36) - places where we and our children and grand children can live. How exciting to partner with God.

All the best,

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Vicky's response:

Dear Steve,

Thank you for taking the time to attend (and bring others to) yesterday's presentation - your interest and enthusiasm are exactly what the community needs. We'll add your support for the slogan to our tally. There will also be many ways in which residents can connect and assist in the process as it continues so feel free to continue providing us with feedback.

Also, thank you for your kind words - it's nice to know when I achieve my goals

Best regards,

Vicky Soderberg