

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:
Brian D. Tucker (btucker@crain.com)

EDITOR:
Mark Dodosh (mdodosh@crain.com)

MANAGING EDITOR:
Scott Suttell (ssuttell@crain.com)

OPINION

Big deal

Excuse us if we shed briefly the pessimism for which Clevelanders are famous, but we're starting to get excited about the prospects for the planned convention center and medical merchandise mart in downtown Cleveland.

Our skepticism over whether this project ever would come to pass began fading in late May with word that Cuyahoga County finally had gained control over the last parcel of land it needed to make room for the complex. Our pulse quickened with the unveiling of a smart architectural design that rests the medical mart in a glass-encased structure directly above a leg of the convention hall.

Then *Crain's* reporter Jay Miller learned on a trip two weeks ago to Chicago that the project's developer, MMPI Inc., was busy leveraging its considerable connections in the trade show business to line up prospects for both the convention center and medical mart. MMPI owns the mammoth Merchandise Mart in Chicago, and that week was using a big gathering of contract manufacturers to pitch a group of 40 exhibitors of furniture for hospitals, doctors' offices and other medical facilities on taking showroom space in the Cleveland medical mart.

As Jay reported, it wasn't a casual sales job. MMPI was offering the exhibitors a year of free space in the medical mart for every year of paid leased space.

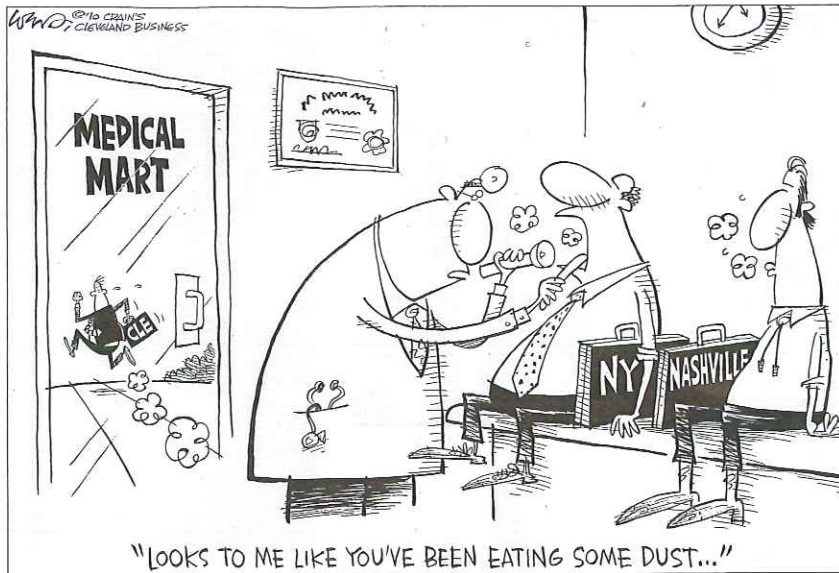
MMPI senior vice president Mark Falanga said the company has signed letters of intent for 12 conventions and 24 showroom spaces in the planned complex. Letters of intent admittedly are far from firm commitments, but they provide evidence of outside interest in the project and of MMPI's efforts to make the meeting venue a success.

Potential competition for the Cleveland medical mart still lurks in Nashville and New York, both of which have announced their own med mart plans. However, the tens of millions of tax dollars already squirreled away by Cuyahoga County for the meeting complex plus its expected groundbreaking in October should give Cleveland a jump on its would-be rivals. Add an attractive yet functional design and an aggressive marketing effort, and there's reason to believe Cleveland's meeting hall could be the draw its promoters have envisioned.

Nice jobs

While we're in a cheery mood, we'll make note of the e-mail we got last week from Chris Thompson, a former *Crain*-ite and director of marketing, communications and civic outreach with The Fund for Our Economic Future. His subject line: "Man Bites Dog: Cleveland #2 in Job Growth."

Sure enough, a chart attached to the e-mail showed Cleveland was second only to Indianapolis among the nation's 40 largest cities in the percentage of private-sector job growth from January to May. As Chris noted: "I'm not sure if these numbers will hold up over the long haul, but I doubt there was ever a time coming out of the last few recessions that Ohio and/or Cleveland were at the top of any such lists." Amen to that.



FROM THE PUBLISHER

Obama misses opportunity in spill

When will our presidents start to get it? I know, that's a loaded question. But really, why can't President Barack Obama seize the BP oil platform tragedy in the Gulf of Mexico as his chance at history? Why does he instead cling to politics as usual, ignoring the opportunity to make lasting change for America, much like his predecessor?

But as long as we're asking uncomfortable questions, why doesn't Congress respond to what America wants, and put regulatory teeth where it's needed?

Back to our presidents. Recently, I spent a few days with an old friend (well, actually, a longtime friend who's years my junior). He's a conservative, thoughtful Republican and an insightful watcher of current events of all sorts, from global to local. As we rode in the car, we discussed politics a bit and he compared the current president's mishandling of this oil crisis to President Bush's botching the aftermath

of the Sept. 11 attacks on America. "Bush stood on that rubble in New York and had the chance to change history by rallying Americans to a new energy policy," he said, with the disappointment clear in his voice. "Instead, we got a senseless war in Iraq that's costing us billions and billions of dollars."

BRIAN TUCKER



"And now Obama is spending his time beating up on BP executives and wagging this crazy war in Afghanistan instead of tackling the tough problem of energy." Let's face it. We haven't had a president serious about energy policy since Jimmy Carter, and too many people write him off as a policy wonk/nuclear engineer who couldn't get anything done. And Americans are their own worst enemy in this as well, forgetting about energy conservation as soon as gasoline prices come down.

Our country is still struggling with the effects of a recession the likes of which most Americans only knew about in history books and stories from their

parents or grandparents. The Great Depression changed a generation; the Great Recession is hurting a generation, but the worst thing might be that it doesn't change it.

I might be wrong (it happens from time to time — just ask my kids), but it seems that much of the economic troubles we've faced over the past two years were caused by a toxic combination of regulatory laxity and human greed.

Oversight didn't work, and now generations of Americans will be burdened by the enormous debt America has taken on to pay for this massive recovery plan. But has Congress done anything meaningful to enact the kind of regulation necessary to avoid a sequel? Nope.

Similarly, the stories are horrifying about the cozy connection between the oil drillers and oil companies and the federal regulators that were supposed to be overseeing their actions off our shores. What are the chances that our government — administration and lawmakers — will do anything critical to avoid a future mega-spill?

LETTERS

Inner Belt should have walk/bike access

I am writing to urge Gov. Ted Strickland to insist that the design and construction of the new Cleveland I-90 Inner Belt bridge, which is being managed by Ohio Department of Transportation, serve the needs of customers (taxpayers) for at least the next 50 years.

The \$450 million bridge replacement project is being mostly funded with federal money, but ODOT is making the design decisions and building the bridge. Many of us in Northeast Ohio feel strongly that the bridge should be built not only for cars and trucks — like the existing 50-year-old bridge it replaces — but also should include safe access for people who walk and bicycle to school, work and entertainment.

We see a shift occurring in transportation needs and habits and think our infrastructure should accommodate

healthy, friendly, efficient active transportation. There are many reasons to consider this shift as we replace older bridges in Ohio. Access for active transportation benefits economic development, public health and the environment. It also benefits national security by reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.

ODOT has not taken a business approach to evaluating the cost benefit of accommodating active transportation as part of our new bridge. Early in the project, it did a cursory estimate of the cost of a bike/pedestrian path. The design criteria used were not optimized and resulted in a number that equals about 4% added to the cost of this project.

ODOT also has not rigorously estimated how much active transportation will grow over the next several generations. In short, ODOT has failed to do an

appropriately thorough needs and cost-benefit analysis for this project. ODOT has given many reasons why a bike/pedestrian path should not be considered. Some of the reasons on ODOT's list are just plain silly, but many need to be seriously discussed.

Design-build teams are now completing preliminary designs and costs and a final plan will be selected in the fall. The governor should direct ODOT District 12 to request that each design-build team bidding include a conceptual design and budget cost estimate for a separated bike/pedestrian multiuse path on the new bridge. Although unlikely, these design teams could discover design synergies that could add this path without added cost.

ODOT has not accommodated active transportation on any of its interstate See **LETTERS** Page 11

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Are you



LEE WAY
Cleveland
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THE BIG ISSUE

Are you watching the World Cup?



LEE WAY
Cleveland

I'm from Japan, so I was pulling for Japan. We lost, which kind of sucks, but that's about it. ... Your friends and everyone will be talking about it, so you have to catch up.



JESSICA BERES
North Royalton

No, not at all. I'm busy, I work and go to school, so I don't have time. I watch regular sports — I watched the Cavs season, I admit that.



TIM SCHULTZ
Middleburg Heights

I have. I'm not a huge soccer fan, but when it comes around, the World Cup, I definitely follow it. ... I actually watched (the Americans' comeback) like 10 or 15 times.



SCOTT DILYARD
Cleveland

I am watching the World Cup, significantly more than the last time around. ... Yesterday I was at work, with my Blackberry, announcing to everybody the play by play.

» Watch more people weigh in by visiting the Multimedia section at www.CrainsCleveland.com.

LETTERS

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bridges. However, there are more than 30 bridges in the U.S. that do accommodate active transportation. Many of them are interstate highway bridges, and some have been designed by the very people who are bidding on our Inner Belt bridge project. I further urge that ODOT have an expert agency create a report about traffic projections — including active transportation — for the estimated life of the bridge.

Only with good information can we make an informed business decision about the cost benefit of investing in a bike/pedestrian path for our new bridge. It appears that ODOT has prematurely made up its mind on this issue without due diligence regarding design and cost information.

ODOT seems to be relying on outdated information used during the past 50 years of highway and bridge design. Relying on old data likely will not result in the best bridge for the next 50 years.

The governor should hold ODOT accountable for making a business decision about the investment value of a bike/pedestrian path for us, the customers, after obtaining appropriate design and cost information. ODOT works for Gov. Strickland, and we are the customers. This is

too important and long-lasting to mess up.

Mike Neundorfer
Founder and chairman
Neundorfer Inc.

Max Hayes needs support

■ Thank you for your June 21 story, "Area manufacturers have their say on new Max Hayes," about the project to redesign the educational program at Max Hayes High School, one of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's career-tech high schools.

This project began late last year and has involved hundreds of volunteer hours, site visits and discussions to create a modern, innovative approach to career tech education in transportation, construction and construction management, manufacturing technology and IT.

For this approach to work, the new school also will need integrated social and community services to support students' needs and the capacity to ensure that partnerships with industry and business create real-world learning and the formation of adult relationships that can help students succeed.

In addition to the manufacturers whom you noted participated in

our June meeting, business leaders from three other clusters, as noted above, also participated. Nearly 100 joined us for our kickoff meeting in March, and we had over 50 people return for our June meeting.

IT, transportation and construction officials, as well as community organizations joined with manufacturers to create a framework for 21st-century education at Max Hayes. In addition, students and Max Hayes' teachers have weighed in on the critical success factors needed at the new school.

The project would not succeed without the business and community partnerships that are forming around the new Max Hayes learning agenda.

John Coln
President and executive director
Wire-Net
Cleveland

WRITE TO US

Send your letters to: Mark Dodosh, editor, *Crain's Cleveland Business*, 700 W. St. Clair Ave., Suite 310, Cleveland, OH 44113-1230
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andrew.coleman@amj.com



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Vice President
"2009 Industrial Transaction of the Year"
joe.messina@amj.com

For real estate services:

Robert J. Roe, SIOR
Managing Director
+ 1 216 681 7171

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Real value in a changing world

United Way agency offers budget help

With state officials facing what could be an \$8 billion budget gap in their next two-year budget, a United Way agency in Cleveland that focuses on policy matters in health and human services is taking the unusual step of recommending a variety of tax increases and spending cuts as a way to deal with the expected shortfall.

The recommendations are found in "Thinking the Unthinkable: Finding Common Ground for Resolving Ohio's Fiscal Crisis," a report from the Center for Community Solutions. The center's executive director and report author John A. Begala said the study "seeks an analytical tone and unapologetically strays into a call for action."

Mr. Begala said solving the budget crisis will take a "spirit of

ON THE WEB Story from www.CrainsCleveland.com.

collaboration in common cause" to come up with fresh solutions and to make cuts in "cherished programs."

Among the tax increase options the center recommends are restoring income tax rates on the wealthiest taxpayers to the levels of the early 1990s, raising the rate of the commercial activities tax on business and temporarily increasing the sales tax. Few areas of the budget are exempted from spending cuts, which the study says could run 15% to 20% across the board.

The center recommends increased cost controls on Medicaid spending and gradually reducing the state's prison population by expanding the use of community corrections alternatives for nonviolent offenders.



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