

Cultural contribution of the capital city

I like Providence. But it was not always so.

As a youngster growing up between Boston and Providence, my friends and I very seldom ventured south into that city of corruption, clutter and crime; after all this was where the Mob was centered. Rightly or wrongly, that was the image that was conveyed.

On the few occasions when we came in that direction, we vowed never to come back again to a city that was impossible to cross by way of Route 6 because of the circuitous road and the poor signage.. Although easier today, I still am sometimes asked by an out-of-state driver stuck in the city center to find that road.

When I moved to Rhode Island in the 50s with a job in Providence, there was no way that I would live and raise my children in that nefarious city. So after living in two suburban communities, I took leave, with my family, for a year of study in London. On our return I did a strange thing: I bought a house in Providence.

American cities are different from those in Europe. I could not afford the family housing in London, so I lived in the suburbs where the housing was less expensive. When I came back to this country, I could not afford to buy in the expensive suburbs so had to settle for a cheaper house in the city.

This was the time of the great abandonment of the American city as the middle class moved out to that nirvana

called suburbia. In Europe the cities remained strong with high demand and prices for city housing.

The next 15 years of living in Providence, with one year away for more study in London, were the best years of all. Professionally productive, gaining street-smarts, rubbing elbows with decision makers, working with residents in different neighborhoods, and discovering the pool of talented people throughout the city, I acquired an intimate view of what I have studied most of my career- cities.

Perhaps best of all, I had easy access to the many cultural opportunities that cities have to offer: theater, symphonies, art galleries, museums and those experiences that give joy, lift the spirits and refresh our sense of beauty.

I was reminded of this in a five-day cultural spree my wife and I recently experienced. Over two days in New York City we saw two plays and spent time at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Botanical Garden. Then back home to Trinity for a play and a musical at Rhode Island College.

Coming on the heels of the visit to the center of culture - New York City and then returning to Providence, provided the opportunity to make comparisons between the two. Rhode Island's capital city more than held its own.

Looking around at the audience in the relatively small Douglas Fairbanks Theater in New York gave a clue that this play would be different. Howard Crabtree's "When Pigs Fly" proved to be outrageous, colorful, full of double entendres, well-performed and a hilarious musical - great in New York but this pig might not fly in Providence.

Seasoned performers, Rip Torn and Shirley Knight, play the leads in "The Young Man From Atlanta" at the Longacre Theater. They and the play have received excellent reviews.

Back to Providence the next day and the chance to see "Ambition Facing West" playing at Trinity. Sitting close to the actors in the small, intimate theater, watch-

ing the well-acted action take place and feeling the passion expressed by the performers made the play far more interesting and exciting, to this viewer, than *The Young Man* playing in New York.

Changing house needs, affordable housing and getting old dictated a move from the city that I had grown to appreciate as well as to discover that images of the city from afar are not always true.

Still working in the city in semi-retirement, supporting Providence-based organizations which work for the betterment of the city and proudly showing visitors clean streets and the great physical changes taking place in the city, as well as a fledgling innovative arts and entertainment district, I try to keep abreast of the changing face of our capital city. Why? Because I like Providence.

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