

HUD report hails city's revival

Recent rankings of Providence have given it high grades, ranging from restaurant reviews to being named by *Money* magazine as the best city in the Northeast in which to live. All of these tributes have received considerable publicity. But the best endorsement of the city's revitalization likely comes from a publication not commonly seen by the public, the annual State of the Cities report published by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Published this year, "Strategies for Success: Reinventing Cities for the 21st Century", this latest report from HUD looks at those factors that have brought about a reversal in the fortunes of most American cities in the 1990s after two decades of decline. Citing 10 cities in the country, including Providence, that are making the

successful transition from the old industrial economy that brought greatness to our cities in the last century to the new economy based on knowledge and information, the report details the strategies used by these 10 cities to bring about this change.

According to the report, the five fastest growing sectors of the 1990s were: business services, health services, eating and drinking places, engineering and management services and special building trade contractors. These five sectors, all of which tend to locate in cities, accounted for over 70 percent of all new jobs in the 114 cities for which data were available.

The cities selected for study were those which lost jobs in the 1980s but gained jobs in the 1990s or were regional leaders whose rate of job growth was significantly higher in the region. Provi-

dence, along with six other cities, appeared in the former category while Boise, Fargo and Omaha were in the latter.

What brings about city revitalization? A brief listing of these 10 cities, together with strategies used, suggests some reasons for their success. In Akron, former tire capital and now polymer research and development center, it was partnerships with the University of Akron and other colleges together with city and state efforts which have brought in 35,000 jobs in more than 400 polymer-related firms. Denver, by contrast, owes its revitalization to a redeveloped downtown, including Coors Field and a new convention center, together with measures designed to increase housing in its downtown. The results of these measures has increased the downtown population by 66 percent in the last two decades.

Listed among these top 10 cities is our own Providence whose manufacturing jobs suffered a drop from 60,000 to 12,000 but is now witnessing a remarkable comeback. In the late 1970s the Providence Foundation was established and together with Mayor

Clanci this public-private partnership set goals for revitalizing the city. Under the leadership of the mayor, government help to move railroads and rivers, renewed efforts to recapture the waterfront and bringing back retailing with a super-regional mall, the Capital Center served as the heart of these revitalizing efforts.

In addition, there was a partnering with the institutions of higher education, continuing success with historic preservation, establishment of an arts district and now a vision of "New Cities" in three locations of the downtown area. And through it all, the leadership of Mayor Cianci is constantly cited.

Although this report may not get the visibility of other publications that herald the great things happening in our capital city, this HUD report should find its way out to the media and beyond. And the reason it should is because it demonstrates how some cities have used innovative measures, together with strong leadership, to reconstitute themselves.

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