

TALES OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Marketing the Region to Attract Companies to Relocate Here



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THOMAS G. MORR
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF SELECT GREATER PHILADELPHIA

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About Select Greater Philadelphia

Select Greater Philadelphia (Select) is an economic development marketing organization dedicated to attracting companies to Greater Philadelphia. It assists company executives who are interested in relocating their businesses to the region by providing detailed information about the 11-county area, which encompasses Southeastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey and Northern Delaware.

Select (www.selectgreaterphiladelphia.com) offers a one-stop connection to numerous resources that help companies make informed decisions about locating to Greater Philadelphia. Through global marketing

Thomas G. Morr, Select Greater Philadelphia's president and CEO, also is a member of the CEO Council for Growth. Additionally, he serves on the executive committee and board of the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau and the board of the Smithsonian Institute's National Air and Space Museum. Before joining Select in June 2005, he served as the managing partner of the Greater Washington Initiative, an organization that markets the National Capital area.

Your organization offers many effective programs and informative reports that help to improve the region's economic development. In particular, it attracts and encourages companies to relocate to the area. Of course, more employers here means more jobs. But how does the organization's work help foster the economic empowerment of the citizens who are living here already?

Morr: The best way to empower someone is to help them find a job or start a business. At Select, we've brought 74 businesses to the region in the past half dozen years. And they've brought about 10,000 jobs with them. We promote the area, improving its image as a business-friendly location. We provide services so corporate decision makers can learn about the opportunities here.

To do that work, we have a research team that pulls together information on this region, so we can tell its story. We pull together data that represents this metropolitan area. If you look at the 11-county region, we usually rank fourth to seventh, depending on what's being measured. We make sure the business world knows about Philadelphia, thus helping to attract companies and create jobs.

We support the work being done by the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and its smaller group, the CEO Council for Growth, the latter of which includes 60 to 65 top leaders in the region. The CEO Council is pursuing an agenda to make the area a better place to do business. The Council uses three policy initiatives to guide its work.

The first is infrastructure, ensuring that, for example, the airport has what it needs to operate, and Septa has its funding.

There's a working group of the CEO Council that focuses on the second policy initiative, which is to grow the entrepreneurial culture of the region, to encourage more people to start a business here. They encourage entrepreneurs to take ideas and technologies developed by the major academic institutions in the region, and those entrepreneurs in turn get those ideas commercialized.

The third policy is human capital. The Council wants to ensure that businesses are talking to academic institutions about the kinds of people being educated in universities and community colleges, and that they are being educated to have the skills to fulfill the jobs available here. The Chamber's University President's

efforts, Select works to promote the region's key assets to help build the area's economy. Select is a private, non-profit organization and an affiliate of the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.

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Council helps to enable this third policy initiative.

Regarding high school students, Mayor Nutter has set a goal to cut the drop-out rate in half and to improve academic performance in city schools. The Mayor has created the Council of College and Career Success, and I'm a member of that. We work to engage students, give them opportunities to see what they need to do to be successful, and encourage and help them to continue their educations in K through 12th grade, and to graduate. The more a community can help kids to stay in school, the more likely those children are to be able to help themselves, giving them a chance at a better life. The Council recommends programs and approves allocation of state and federal funds that can help students realize their future potential for success.

Also, the Chamber has committed to helping the Philadelphia School System improve. It has offered, for example, loaned executives to help the District, and it's been active in asking businesses to create summer internships for city high school students.

The Chamber also has the "Read to Me" program in which business leaders read to elementary school students, so the students see that reading is an important basic skill.

The more people in the community who are helping young people to achieve success, the better the community will be. Moreover, many companies in this region need employees who excel at math, science, technology and engineering. So we need to ensure students are getting the proper training.

On the college side, Community College of Philadelphia is a huge resource for the city. Its graduates are guaranteed entry into some four-year schools, such as Temple. CCP also gives certificates for job training, and it does employee training for companies.

So we have several organizations that are encouraging people to attend college here, complete their degrees here, and hopefully work or start business here. Among those groups are Campus Philly, which attempts to get students to enroll in academic institutions here, and Graduate Philadelphia, which encourages people who started college to finish.

Philadelphia was a leading area during the industrial age and up to the mid-1950s. We were hit hard by the manufacturing losses. It was a wrenching transition, but ideas to transition away from manufacturing started here sooner than other areas — by necessity. All of these programs I've mentioned are working to answer the basic question: What do we do now, after the manufacturing jobs have gone?

Here's what we do: 75 percent of employees in this region now work in the service sector. Most are in knowledge-based industries. This is partly the reason educational attainment rates have increased in the area during the past 20 years. We're trying to help people to be empowered and be successful in life, to finish their educations, gain the skills to be more competitive on the job market or to start a business. We're all interconnected on this. The business community needs good talent to thrive.

Mayor Nutter, during his second inaugural address in January, said he is not motivated by pride and satisfaction in past accomplishments, but by a vision of what can be. What is your vision of what Philadelphia's economic future can be?



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Morr: If we're collectively successful in helping people get as much education as is fruitful for them, that will create economic empowerment. When we talk with companies thinking about relocating, one of the first questions they tend to ask is about the workforce in the region. We help them to understand there are people who can help them. We just completed a perception study among the area's employers and found they have a high opinion of the workforce here.

Talent is a critical factor in where a company relocates. In the age of the Internet and advanced telephony, a person can work almost anywhere. Companies then locate to take advantage of people's talent in a given region, because it's about a top-notch workforce. If we empower people to be the most they can be, that will make other companies want to be here so they, too, can be successful. It feeds on itself positively.

Mayor Nutter spoke about the fact that he was not left behind when he grew up in West Philly. He wants to give those same opportunities to anyone. That's a very laudable goal, and if it can be accomplished, it will benefit all of us.

Please finish this sentence: If Philadelphia-area citizens were more empowered economically, this region could enjoy ...

Morr: Fewer social problems, increased economic success, enhanced reputation as a place to do business, better quality of life and greater prosperity.

People have the opportunity to make themselves whatever they want to be. It may not always seem that way. And that's what the Mayor was talking about. He wants to ensure that people have a vision of where they want to go, so they can take their destinies into their own hands. There's a lot of effort and groups of people working to make that happen. It requires a community's support and people to recognize it's really up to them. If they want something, they have to pursue it. Empowerment is about showing people this is all possible.

What lessons could the Philadelphia area learn from your previous work with the Greater Washington Initiative?

Morr: In Washington, about one-third of the economy is tied to the U.S. government. In many ways, it's like a company town. It's not as diverse of an economy as we have here in Philadelphia.

For Philadelphia, economic diversity is a good thing, because typically not all sectors suffer at the same time or to the same degree. Yes, we have a concentration of higher education and healthcare, and those two sectors didn't suffer during the recent downturn. Still, there is a good level of economic diversity here in the Philadelphia area, and so people have choices.