



Proper Prior Partnerships Prevent Pitifully Poor Performance

BOYNE CITY'S TEAM BOYNE EXPERIENCE

By Michael Cain

During the recent League Convention on Mackinac Island, the Thursday afternoon session titled "How Community Partnerships Are Critical to Vibrant Communities" rang true to Boyne City experiences. Saginaw Community Foundation President Renee Johnston said you can't wait to develop relationships until you really need them. For nearly a decade the City of Boyne City, a growing community of year-round residents, has been putting that theory into practice.

Boyne City likes to try new things. In 2003, the city became one of the first communities accepted into Michigan's newly-restored, statewide Main Street Program. Three years later, MSU Extension's economic development team launched its new Creating Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) initiative. Both of these efforts, while still in their formative stages, fit in with Boyne City's formally adopted, community-based goal of enhancing economic development opportunities in our community.

Through the Main Street Program, the city developed a team of volunteers and raised \$5,000 to participate with nine other teams from across Michigan in a four-day training program that made the case and provided the tools for building entrepreneurial communities. Existing bonds between many elements of the Boyne City community were strengthened, and the genesis for Team Boyne was created. Over those four February days of living, learning, and working together, not only were new skills acquired but old assumptions and misconceptions dispelled.

Team Boyne is Born

Upon returning back to Boyne City, it was up to those who attended to share what they learned with their respective governing bodies and see what this new, somewhat vague, effort called Team Boyne could do for our community. The circle was expanded to include the Chamber of Commerce executive director, school superintendent, library director, staff from Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (our regional economic development agency), and more members of the business community.



So what exactly is Team Boyne? It isn't an official city body, although it acts in a similar capacity and has replaced our Main Street program's Economic Development Committee. But it has no real authority of its own. It's a voluntary group of members of the business community, nonprofits,

and leading organizations interested in promoting entrepreneurship and economic development. It is a welcoming environment where new and existing businesses can get confidential support and guidance from the rest of the Boyne City community. Sometimes it's just moral support or a listening ear for someone thinking about getting a new business off the ground. Other times, it's a suggestion, referral, or connection that opens the door for someone or helps prevent a mistake.

Meeting on a regular monthly basis, Team Boyne brings community leaders together for some very important networking. It isn't uncommon to have 25-30 people sitting around the table, each sharing what is new or important with their organization as well as what they are hearing on the street. This way, everyone has a good, general understanding of where the community is going and any items that might need to be addressed. This process helps avoid surprises and circumvent parties working at cross purposes. It has been amazing to watch how guards have come down and real dialogs have developed.

TAKEAWAYS

- Don't be afraid to try something new, it's guaranteed not to work only if you don't try it.
- Don't be afraid to invest in yourself.
- Build your networks and relationships now, before you need them.
- If you want a better community, work together and tear down those silos.
- Don't, or let others, go it alone.

Team Boyne In Action

One of Team Boyne's first major community outreach efforts was to have teams of individuals visit businesses in the community. The first round of visits were real eye-openers. People wondered why we were there and what we wanted. After learning we were there to listen and find out their needs and issues in a confidential setting, they started to share and realize that the community cared about them as individuals and as businesses. This Team Boyne outreach program, done every few years, has been one of the biggest transformative steps I have seen for fostering trust and cooperation in my over 30 years of local government experience.

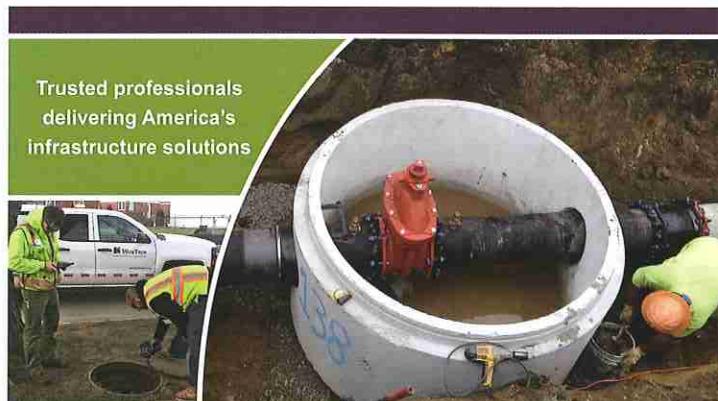
Team Boyne has also had a significant positive impact on one of Boyne City's signature businesses. They are a family run organization with a worldwide reputation for quality products. When they first came to Boyne City years ago,

they didn't feel welcome. They were off in their part of the city without much contact or feeling of support from the rest of the community. Now that Team Boyne is in place, they say that feeling has changed 180 degrees. They feel welcomed as a valuable part of a supportive community and no longer feel alone. How valuable is that change in attitude by both the community and that business when a new or existing business is looking for a place to set up shop or grow?

Team Boyne has opened the doors to Boyne City in so many ways. It has helped us develop countless community partnerships that supported Boyne City's efforts to become the vibrant community that it is today. But there is so much more to do in Boyne City and probably in your community, as well. What might work where you live? Be open and encourage new opportunities for those in your community to connect and cooperate. It won't happen overnight. It takes time, effort, and commitment. And while it doesn't take a lot of money, the results can be priceless.

BOYNE CITY
pop. 3,735

Michael Cain is the city manager of Boyne City. You may contact him at 231-582-0377 or mcain@boynecity.com.



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