



CITY OF CLEVELAND
Mayor Frank G. Jackson

Cleveland is a Great City

At this time of year, people typically wax poetic on the speedy passage of time and look forward to the next year with anticipation and the notion that somehow next year will bring the success and fulfillment for which we are looking. This year is different. 2008 has brought about a sense of uncertainty and economic challenges that have not been seen in generations. People are nostalgic for the good old days because the times we live in have changed so much.

What has not changed however is my ability to believe in the potential of the City of Cleveland to not only survive this latest economic challenge, but emerge from these uncertain times as a place reinvented, with a downtown that is alive 24-hours a day and with neighborhoods that are the envy of any city in the United States. I believe this because the City of Cleveland has the natural and cultural assets that make Cleveland the envy of the region.

Many local politicians and civic leaders praise the assets of Cleveland and expound upon Cleveland's potential. I am one of those politicians. I have worked for the last three years to strengthen Cleveland's assets and position the city for the future. One of my biggest challenges in accomplishing this has been the pervasive negative attitude of this region. You see it splashed across newspaper headlines and at the top of news broadcasts. You hear it in the voices of those who talk of Cleveland only in terms of the burning river, the foreclosure crisis, and violence in the city.

Cleveland's biggest impediment to achieving civic greatness is the pessimistic, unenthusiastic mind-set of many within our region, particularly those with the ability to express their opinions to mass audiences. Consider recent local headlines: "Cleveland is falling apart - Who will pick up the pieces?" and "Pittsburgh's power over Cleveland." If you were a visiting businessperson or a local developer, would those headlines and accompanying articles give you cause to invest in Cleveland? By contrast, the media outside of Cleveland often report a different view of our city. A Detroit Free Press editorial on city programs that target economic development in September 2008 said, "Cleveland shows other cities how." In October, Business Week

highlighted Cleveland's early prediction of the impact that predatory lending would have on the city and that, despite legal setbacks, the city is still fighting the foreclosure crisis.

The news is not the only source for the negative attitude. This image of Cleveland persists because many, but not all, business leaders and opinion makers echo the sentiment. The negative comments about the city can be heard at social events, receptions, business meetings and in boardrooms. I have often said that, if diagnosed by a psychiatrist, this behavior would demonstrate low self-esteem and that it would be termed clinically depressed.

However, I rarely see this depression in residents at my neighborhood community meetings. At those meetings, I hear a sense of pride, and people are in effect saying: "This is my City. This is my neighborhood and I am proud to live here." People at these meetings will ask questions about city services, express concern about public safety, and sometimes criticize my decisions. But, I cannot recall a time when a resident stood up to say that Cleveland is a dying city and there is nothing left to do but give up.

Nor do I often hear the negativity from visitors. A Costa Rican businessman recently praised the depth of the public-private partnership that he witnessed in Cleveland on his recent trade mission here. I recently received an email from a Bostonian who said: "We were amazed at how friendly the people of Cleveland were. I told my family I had to let you know of how much we appreciated the hospitality of Cleveland's people. We will talk of this and recommend to visit your lovely city." These are just two examples of the positive feedback I receive.

In short, Clevelanders, visitors and transplants alike think that we have a lot to offer. This is not to say that Cleveland and the region are not facing significant challenges. The reality is that Cleveland has advantages and disadvantages and that we have seen both significant success and loss. However, I am undaunted by the multitude of challenges that lie before me as mayor of Cleveland. In fact, I believe that challenges often give us the greatest opportunities.

The opportunities before us now are substantial. In a time when municipalities and states across the country are facing large budget deficits, laying off employees and cutting services, Cleveland has a balanced 2008 budget and is proposing a balanced budget for 2009 without layoffs or service cuts. When cities like Detroit are scrambling to hold onto their traditional economic bases of auto manufacturing, Cleveland is working to attract investment in new economies, like advanced manufacturing and renewable energy, which is why I'm in Germany this week on a trade mission. While

cities like Chicago are seeing increases in violent crime, Cleveland's violent crime has declined by 14% over the last two years.

So as mayor of this city, I do not want Cleveland to be like Chicago or Pittsburgh or any other city. I want Cleveland to be Cleveland. Cleveland has heart. Cleveland is tenacious. Cleveland is reinventing itself into something greater than it has been because I will not allow the negativity of others to cloud my judgment nor guide my decisions. Cleveland is a great city with great opportunities and I look forward to everyone in this community working for the future of Cleveland, not against it.