It's About Shoes

By Ken Harwood

When Brown Shoes, parent company of Famous Footwear, announced almost a year ago that they may relocate their headquarters, I did a little digging in the St. Louis media and discovered that what they really wanted was for Missouri to pony up to keep them in the state. I knew this from the first day and yet I used this publication and my news blog to encourage us as a community to contact the CEO (who has Madison roots) and others at Brown Shoes and invite, even entice, them to come to Madison. I did this for months, knowing we would lose the game, regardless of our efforts. Shame on me.

I want you to know my intentions were good. As a community, we need to have a clear understanding of how important each and every business is to this team that is Greater Madison. We need to have a clear perception of all we have to offer. We need to know that the game is not always about becoming Silicon Valley, Hollywood or the Saudi Arabia of alternative fuels – sometimes it's about shoes.

I hope we learned a lot by playing. Did we put all the players we could on the floor? Did we play to our strengths? Did we get the crowd in the game? Did we know our opponent well? Did we play to win?

Some observations for the next game: Team Greater Madison is “greater” when all the communities play. For example: We should invite the opponent to tour the EPIC campus. We should take them to the Bier Garten at Capitol Brewery. We should ask Berbee to talk about their IT needs. We should mention the 100-plus-acre development sites just north of the city on a major arterial. We should offer up blues at Stellas.

We need to use the whole court. Don’t get me wrong, I think we played a great game. We did play to win. We featured our stars. I just want to make sure we explore the depth charts every time we take the floor. And as for me, I am excited about the next game and will continue to take the half court shot at the buzzer, because when it goes in it is very, very cool, win or lose.

Major projects

After years of trying, the Regent-Monroe Street intersection near Camp Randall will see a new 48-room boutique hotel. Madison architect Bob Sieger has proposed several projects on the site over the last four years before finding a project that pleased both the neighborhood and the council.

Retail

Marcus plans to build a new, mixed-use entertainment center, complete with sports bar, 19 screens, dining, family entertainment and more on 26 acres near the existing Eastgate theater. Once the new building is complete, Eastgate will come down as Marcus plans to redevelop the site.

For the record, Marcus also builds large, wonderful hotels. Since they recently purchased the Sheraton, we may want to mention that we need 500 or 600 rooms downtown. Mr. Otto, can we talk?

Commercial/Office

Google and Microsoft are coming to town. While these are very small projects, they have both said nice things about Madison. This should help attract other IT players.

A large amount of new brick and mortar has resulted in a number of local companies upgrading to new spaces. This should create some opportunities for other businesses to expand, or better yet relocate, to the Madison area.

Homes/Condos

In an interesting turn of events, some area developers have switched from homes and condos to building apartment units in Madison. These new units are lowering the occupancy rates for many of the homes and flats that were popular student housing until recently. The owners of these units are finding it difficult to keep up payments, maintenance and taxes on the older properties. Watch for more neighborhoods that combine multiple single-family lots into higher-density, upscale development.

Conclusion

In Greater Madison, the game is about shoes, and more importantly, the people in them. I continue to believe this area is one of the best places to live in the world. We will continue to play hard and eventually, more and more companies will want to be on our team. We will trade for some players, and we will develop others. Finally, if you do not know about blues at Stellas, you need to.

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