

Toledo, Ohio

Population, 317,606

Located at the western end of Lake Erie, Toledo, is an active Great Lakes port, rail and manufacturing center, noted for the manufacture of glass, automotive parts, sprak plubs, paint sprayers and plastics. It is the home of the University of Toledo, the Medical College of Ohio and the world famous Toledo Museum of Art. Toledo is the home to four Fortune 500 companies and was recently ranked second among 15 other economic competitors in the Midwest.

For 92 years, and through two world wars, Toledo has been most famous for one product, the much beloved Jeep. In the 1980, however, a slump in the auto industry led to a major downturn in Toledo's economy. The unemployment rate reached 12.9 percent. Plant closings and layoffs were rampant as industry took jobs south and overseas. Renalt/American Motors, then majority owners of the Jeep plant struggled. They borrowed from employee benefits and future wage increases only to renege on their promise to repay. Workers were left with a sense of anger and uncertainty. In 1987, the Chrysler Cooperation established a sense of hope and security by buying the struggling company. But the Jeep plant was growing old, and talk of building a new factory, possible in another city or state, deepend the local sense of economic insecurity. Spending by the plant and its employee amounts to nine percent of the city's economy.

The story of how Toledo kept Jeep at home could be an inspiration to other "rust belt" communities. Workers, citizens, labor, business leaders and government pulled together to mount a "Toledo Loves Jeep" campaign, a six month, community-wide effort that included billboards, banners, parades, rallies, thousands of letters to Chrysler, and even a song about the community's love for the maker of four-wheelers. In July of 1997, Chrysler announced that it would build a \$1.2 billion plant on vacant industrial land within the city limits of Toledo, inspiring the headline in Newsweek Magazine, "A Rare Win for a City: Chrysler decided to stay put, and Toledo rejoices.

Toledo has a widely diverse population. Since 1990, the city's overall population has decreased slightly. Toledo faces some tough challenges. Disfranchised young people in less advantaged areas suffer from many problems, education challenges, low self-esteem and lack of discipline. Past neglect of housing investments and an unsatisfactory level of crime in public housing contributed to the exodus of the metropolitan population. To meet these challenges, the most committed citizens from all walks of life representing business, teachers, parents, students, civic groups and unions have come together. These efforts are having results.

In partnership with government, private and nonprofit partners, the city provides innovative and constructive neighborhood revitalization projects and affordable market rate housing opportunities. Unemployment levels have sunk to a low of 6.3 percent. The city's success in fighting economic decline has been noted by such publications as Time Magazine and the London Financial Times.

Toledo has a long tradition of civic activism dating back to Samuel M. "Golden Rule" Jones, who was elected to office on a nonpartisan reform ticket in the late 1890s. The "Golden Rule" principle, which he practiced in his business and in public life, was continued by his successor, Brad Whitlock for four terms. Toledo's citizens participate in a wide variety of civic activities. They routinely vote at higher percentages than the national average. More than 500 citizens serve on 50 boards and commissions of the city to help establish priorities and plan for Toledo's future. Citizens are also active in 15 community development corporations, 191 clubs and professional organizations and 393 churches, synagogues and mosques. Fed up with rising crime figures, citizens began forming block watch groups several years ago. There are now 225 groups within the city. In 1996, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno recognized Toledo's block watch program as one of the best in the country.

Organizations like Leadership Toledo, United Way Young Leaders Council and the City of Toledo's Women and Minority Mentoring programs, tap into a reservoir of private and public leaders. Community's Commitment to Children Committee was born as a result of an increase in youth crime. A Youth Commission was appointed in 1995 with a broad focus on reaching Toledo's Youth. A teen summit was conducted by the commission and it drew more than 300 youth to practice leadership skills and discuss civic issues.

Toledo's civic fabric was recently tested when the public schools were faced with the possibility of its first teachers strike since the early 1980s. Community forums were conducted and labor, government and business leaders met face to face. It became clear to both the teacher's union and school district management that the city's children could not afford such an eventuality. After extensive pressure from various the community, leaders from the AFL-CIO and UAW facilitated a labor/management agreement three days before the strike was due to start.

Judan Judo

Recognizing that local youth needed help to break away from negative patterns of behavior, two Toledo police officers created an organization called Judan Judo in 1991. The program was designed to increase self-esteem, create positive methods of dealing with aggression and frustration and to provide new opportunities to youth. Known as the "Gentle Way," Judo is internationally recognized as a sport that improves mental and physical training. In the wake of a series of gang killings, the founders of the program hoped that this activity would minimize street violence by offering an alternative to crime and drugs. Rather than wait for funding to become available, the officers started the club themselves, using tumbling and wrestling mats that were about to be discarded. Anyone over the age of five could participate and compete.

Thus far, of all the at-risk youth who have participated in the club, all but one have maintained a high standard of behavior. The club has numerous success stories. An ex gang leader is now working to get his GED and places as the top competitor in the club. Of the high school seniors competing in the program, about 98 percent received their diplomas. Two young men considered to be "at risk" are now in the military, one as a Green

Beret, another as a Navy Seal. This summer, the organization hosted the International Junior Judo Tournaments. The club's membership has included 11 international champions and three junior Olympic champions. The club is now the fourth largest chapter in the United States. The club strives to incorporate the community's diversity within its membership. About 33 percent of the participants are African-American, 30 percent female and six percent Hispanic.

The Cherry, Bancroft and Summit Street Corridor

How do you get people to move from the suburbs back into the central city? That was the neighborhood activists were asking themselves a few years ago. Drugs, litter and neglect were causing the loss of middle income residents and neighborhood businesses and leading to a perception of high crime along these important corridors to downtown Toledo and various neighborhoods. A massive effort to examine the causes of these negatives trends was undertaken as part of the Cherry, Bancroft, and Summit Street Corridor project. More than 400 people have been involved in planning, analysis and goal setting for this effort. The CBSCC began to review information and develop a strategic plan that would benefit the area. A central strategic planning group was selected. It has unified the plans of six community development efforts into one vision – a community with historical roots. The objective was to create a neighborhood with an identity that would serve the community's cultural, racial and economic diversity.

To accomplish the goals of the coalition's mission statement, three main "action committees" were formed. To address the problems identified, about \$83 million has been invested in the area. Twenty residential structures have been painted and 100 home rehabilitated. Twenty five homes identified as vacant or as nuisances have been demolished. Other properties have been cleaned or abated. One and one third miles of sidewalks, curbs, intersections and streets have been refurbished or upgraded. Twelve vacant and unsaleable commercial structures have been demolished. Seven new businesses have been attracted, creating 77 jobs. The renewal efforts of the CBSCC have restored a sense of ownership, hope and pride to these urban corridors.

Public Housing Improvement

Before 1995, drug dealing and crime within public housing in Toledo and Lucas County were making life dangerous for residents. Occupancy rates within Lucas County Housing Authority units had dropped to 78 percent, while uncollected rents soared to 29 percent. Because of these problems, LMHA was placed on the US Housing and Urban Development Department's "troubled" list.

After an incident involving rival gangs, Leora Robinson, a resident of a local housing project, went to Washington, D.C., to promote legislation and convince President Clinton to issue an Executive Order for a clean-up initiative within public housing. Locally, the Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority decided to take action against the growing problems of drug dealing and violence within public housing. Forming an aggressive partnership with residents, city police and the county sheriff's office, the housing

authority implemented a tough “Get Busted, get out” program to rid the housing developments of lawbreakers and drug dealers. LMHA received funds from the national Drug Elimination Grant program. Six police substations have been opened at housing authority properties. A community policing program beefed up patrols of the troubled housing authority properties.

The results have been dramatic. LMHA developments have seen a 24 percent reduction in drug crimes and a 69 percent decrease in other crimes. Eviction rates of offenders are up, resulting in increased satisfaction and safety for law abiding residents. The successes of the program have been recognized by the White and the national media.