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Showcasing the Region's Best Practices: Community Building
Through Social Enterprise

MS. O'BRIEN: I know that that's going to be difficult to follow, but I have no doubt that our next speaker is up to the task. Is Dr. Byron Brazier in the room? Yes. All right, great. When we first met, we had a 30-minute meeting scheduled, and 2 hours later, I knew that we had to get him here to share with you the story that he is about to tell. It is very innovative and it's something that I think we can all learn, some pretty interesting factoids in terms of how he has been able to put together something that is very innovative, addresses real workforce opportunities for people that sometimes are left behind.

And I want to also alert you that there's a very interesting article from Crane's Business that is on your conference app. So if you have not downloaded your conference app, it's another opportunity, because I don't think you want to miss this particular article.

Dr. Brazier is the current pastor of the Apostolic Church of God in Woodlawn, which is here in Chicago, and he

has a very accomplished business background. Ladies and gentlemen, I know you're going to enjoy learning about community building through social enterprise. Dr. Brazier?

BYRON BRAZIER: Good morning, almost good afternoon to everyone. It's a pleasure to be here, and I certainly appreciate this opportunity to tell what I think is a compelling story about a small community, two square miles, that makes up Woodlawn, that even though the previous president of the United States didn't say, they call it Jackson Park where they're going to put the new library. But that new library is actually in the community of Woodlawn.

My intent today, if I get this -- here we go -- is to explain a little bit more about the Brazier Foundation, which is a foundation that I have founded in 2012 named after my father. And the two aspects that it has in community building, along with a manufacturing L3C that we've actually opened up last week. And this really comes down to this community building which was highlighted through a conversation that I had with a friend who talked about communities and the idea of transformation. And he said that we are in the human services business, we manage people in their condition. And if you manage someone in poverty, that's where they stay.

And so the whole idea was how now do you transform an entire community? How do you change the perception of the community inside the community, as well as outside the community? We began that process by focusing on stakeholders to be truly inclusive and creating voices for transformation.

So a community meeting, or community engagement, is not a meeting. It is a series of very complex understandings of voices. And the idea is that when you create a community vision, a community plan, it must also have a comprehensive apparatus to go along with that plan.

And so this particular dual slide acknowledges that in deficit communities, we are programmed half to death. And this is just, and it's all mixed up, and there are at least 100 of these. I just couldn't put everything on a page. And one of the things that I have told the University of Chicago, which part of its campus is in Woodlawn, is that you guys run a hundreds of millions of dollars worth of programs, but Woodlawn is still the same. And so programming doesn't get you through to the ecology of a community.

So we took a strategic approach, looking at community vision and developing a community plan driven by stakeholders utilizing the four pillars of any community,

which is education, economic development, safety, and health and human services. And whether you are rural, whether you're suburban or urban, those are the four, and they interact with one another. So in well-to-do communities, if you have high education, and high economic development, you will tend to have low safety needs and low human service needs. In underserved communities, you will have low education and low economic development, but you will have high safety needs and high human service needs.

And so programming doesn't change the dial, if you look at those as four dials, from 0 to 10. Programming doesn't change the dials. So we had to come up with mechanisms that actually changed all the dials at the same time, looking at those four pillars, and to organize the community around its own will. What do you will things to be?

And so we looked at this comprehensive organization by taking a look at the community and all of its stakeholders. In 2012, we named the stakeholders the Network of Woodlawn. We have the four pillars, and each one of these four pillars is their own 501c3 and has their own boards. But all the boards interconnect through the executive directors back to the broader board. And what we have found is that what we created in 2012 has worked.

In education, we have no underperforming schools in Woodlawn. Our safety program has gone very well. In 2012, we had 23 homicides in the 2 square miles of Woodlawn. In 2013, after we implemented the plan, we went down to 8. In 2014, we went down to 4. In 2015, we were at 4. In 2016, we were at 4. And it's still 4 too many. But in comparison, we believe that we understand how to get at the safety we need.

And then in 2013 we began our economic development movement, and currently we now have, to make a long story short, an economic development master plan for all of Woodlawn, and we engaged Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to do that for us.

So we looked at this as a systematic approach and tried to make sure that we aligned all of the different elements together. And in that element, we had the community element. We had what is called One Woodlawn, and so no matter which part of Woodlawn you live in -- people have tried to separate West Woodlawn from East Woodlawn, and that doesn't work because the ecology of community should be just one.

And so we have One Woodlawn, and we looked at the different stakeholders. So we have institutional stakeholders, which are all the major institutions, the

University of Chicago, Mt. Carmel High School, the schools and parks and so forth. They're in the institution stakeholder category. They care about their investment, they care about money.

Then we have the Jackson Park Group. These are people who care about birds, trees, and squirrels. They're in a group. You can't put the two in the same room together and try to get a vision. It's just, it doesn't work. I've tried it, and it doesn't work.

The third group are the boards of the Network of Woodlawn which have about 60 different board members, because of the pillars. They care about people. So you've got institutions, you have the parks, and then you have the boards. We also then have the parents around every school, who may not feel engaged enough, and so we go to them as opposed to them coming to us.

And then we took Woodlawn, based economic development plan, and we divided it up into 4 quadrants, and we have 15 to 20 people, residents, planning for Woodlawn all at the same time in the four quadrants. So we actually have pretty close to 100, 125 people engaged in Woodlawn in various factors all at the same time.

We have a master plan, we have quadrants, and we have parents who have done workshops. And when we do our One

Woodlawn meetings, which we have every quarter, we have had nothing less than 400 people in the last 9 community meetings that we've had.

So we believe that we have a good formula for success, but we found that what we produced is not fundable by philanthropy or by government. They fund programmatically. They don't fund infrastructure. They don't fund an ecology of the community, at least not to date. So since we have to have this organization, the organization has to have people, and it has to have funding. What the Brazier Foundation did is that we went out and we started a Manufacturing L3C. It's called BSD, Building Self-Determination.

And it has three aspects to it. The first is it is a workforce development, which is the critical element to this where we train residents in robotic controls. It's a four-stage stackable workforce development program that is in a leading edge. And we created a support system so that the residents move from training into jobs. And the support system stays with them even when they move to the job. Because what we found is that people require, everybody who is successful, that moves to success, always has a support system. All of us have had, and still have, support systems that undergird us, either in mentoring or

in sponsorship, in some way, form, or fashion. And we will continue to do that with them.

When we were trying to figure out how we would fund this, we originally went to Chase, and they funded a \$50,000 grant for us. The Apostolic Church of God, which is the church where the pastor put up another \$50,000 and produced this program that we now have, and it is currently college accredited through the city colleges. And currently in the program, in the classes, actually are provided on the campus of Chicago State University. Our original funding for this manufacturing actually came from the Chicago Housing Authority. They gave us a grant of \$2 million.

And it was a funny story. I'll tell you this funny story, as long as you don't tell anybody else. I had already worked it out with the Chicago Housing Authority, and they said, Mr. John Hooker, a tremendous man, said, "I want to invest in people, not just buildings." And I gave him the idea of this workforce development, and we took it in and he agreed. We took it through some CHA rigors, and then we finally said, well, you know, we have to get the support of the mayor.

So I went to the mayor, and I said, "You know, we'd like your support in this." And he said, "CHA can't do

this." And I said, "Yes, they can." And he said, "No, they can't do this." And I said, "Mr. Mayor, yes, they can." And he said, "I sat on this board for 2, 3 years before I was a congressman. They can't do this." And I said, "Mr. Mayor, they can do this." He said, "So if I call John Hooker right now, would he tell me -- what would he tell me?" I said, "He would tell you that you can do it." He left the room, made a call, and came back, and said, "Okay." And that was the end of the \$2 million discussion.

And so when we opened up the plant, he said, "That was the easiest \$2 million I ever got," not knowing all the different things that had to go on before that. But the idea is that CHA wanted to invest in its people. And that's what we're doing. And now we will be training up to 90 CHA residents in robotic controls every year for the next five years.

We have a robotics plant where we make plastic utensil products. And our apprentices run the plant. There was a gentleman who was a maintenance person. He's 54 years old. He was a maintenance custodian. He went through the entire training. He is now one of our primary operators in this manufacturing plant. We have two major manufacturing lines, FANUC and Motion Controls, which are the producers

of these products, and so we actually make plastic utensils and we market that product into the open market.

The Hyatt Hotels are a client, University of Chicago Hospitals are a client, Midway Distributors, which handles the Cook County Jail, is one of our clients, and one of our other major clients is the Thornton Fractional High School system. And by the way, we are looking for more clients. And the idea is that this -- the revenues from this L3C, which is a low profit, can actually fund the infrastructure that we have.

But it has the possibilities through our revenue projections that it will fund every school in Woodlawn an additional \$250,000 a year over its current budget. We will fully fund our safety program, which is no longer fundable, because our safety numbers are so low. And we're off everybody's list.

And when we went to people and said, you know, we need to continue what we've been doing, they said, well, we can't give you any money because you're not bad enough. I said, so I have to go back to 23 homicides a year before you'll help me? They said, yes, which is crazy, if you want to think about it, but that's the way the philanthropy situation is. So we'll be able to fully fund our safety program, which includes response, intervention, as well as

prevention.

And what we see in this is that there is an ability for a community to replicate both the organizations, as well as -- not necessarily the manufacturing. It could be any social type enterprise that uses and leverages the spin of commercial business, as opposed to them giving your part of their economic engine. And especially if they have a social impact view to the world, you will find that communities like Woodlawn can leverage that capability and leverage that for their advantage.

So it did require an initial investment through government. But I explained to the mayor, I said, "Once we do this, I won't have to come back." And then this is replicable to the west side of Chicago, as well as the southern suburbs. And to the 130 mayors that you might be looking at, or to the others, for those who are here, business-to-business commercial developments, all of that is possible when looked at as a total package and ecology of the community around those four pillars.

Thank you very much. I can take a few questions.

MALE SPEAKER: Dr. Brazier, thank you very much. It was a great story, and maybe the best story I ever heard in a week. So, thank you very much.

DR. BRAIZER: You're welcome.

MALE SPEAKER: Your calm demeanor likely overshadows some of the harder parts of getting some of your efforts done. And so maybe a two part question: Number one, what were some of the mistakes that were made; and number two, is it really replicable without another Dr. Brazier along the way, and how do you actually extend that to other communities?

DR. BRAZIER: Sure, sure. One is that the mission of the Brazier Foundation is not to just stay in Woodlawn, but to tell the story and to support other communities. So the consulting practice of the Brazier Foundation does do that. The lessons learned is you have to stay focused on what you want to build. And it took me two years to get the members of the Network of Woodlawn Board to be able to follow the vision that says, this is where we're going. This is safe for us. And they have to trust in the convener.

So you can have a lot of leaders, but there must be a convener of the leaders in order to make this work. And it doesn't require a church that's -- I have a very large church. And people have said, and even the mayor said, there aren't those size churches in those neighborhoods. I explained to him, I said, "My father was a convener when we had 100 members." So the convener doesn't have to be a pastor, but it has to be somebody that the other leaders

trust.

And then if in fact you have a pathway that says, we had to prove that this pathway worked, and it does work. Now that the pathway works, we can explain this to others and say, this is what is taking place. This is what's happened, and every community will have its own set of dynamics. But I believe that we have a possible way to address the four pillars, and it doesn't address everything, but it's at a high enough level. It's not 40,000 square feet, but it's not ground roots, even though you touch everybody. It is at a place where people can see a vision, and Woodlawn will change.

One of the things that we're doing -- someone mentioned they talked about the repurposing: We're going to repurpose three elementary schools that were closed. We're going to repurpose those. And we're going to turn them into Monadnock building-type environments, with retail on the first floor. We're going to rent out space and have the other two floors for lawyers, architects, so forth and so on. And I believe that there are enough downtown folks who want to be in a different place where there's parking and parks, and things of that nature. We're going to make that available.

So all these things, once you start it, it will be

replicable, and as long as you don't try to control it, or manage it, but him trying to hold onto a marshmallow, you can't hold onto it too tight. If, in fact, we just let things organically grow, it will happen.

Yes, ma'am?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I want to congratulate you on a great program here. I'm from Marquette University, and we're doing something very similar on the New West Side Partnership Program. When Dr. Lovell came to Marquette, he pulled together our regional corporations to see how we could really transform the area near the West Side Partnership. So I want to invite you to Milwaukee. I think this would be a great program to put both of these programs together. And just like you said, the trust factor is huge. We've certainly seen that at Marquette.

But each area has its own DNA, and its own types of challenges. But to bring something together like this, I don't know, Kelly, maybe this is something that we can look at in terms of who else around the Tri-State is actually doing that. So that's great.

DR. BRAZIER: Well, but I want you to be careful. Don't call it a program. That's okay, that's okay. The language becomes very important. What you're dealing with is, how do you build a community, not how do you develop

one. But building a community from the inside out, that then helps smooth out the burden that everybody else has to carry. Because we will, in fact, be able to take care of ourselves in a manner that we could not have done before. And it really brings about -- the BSD actually stands for Building Self-Determination, and that's exactly what we want to do.

MALE SPEAKER: Here we go, hello.

DR. BRAZIER: Yes, sir.

MALE SPEAKER: I want to thank you for a real quick question. First and foremost, congratulations on your project.

DR. BRAZIER: Thank you.

MALE SPEAKER: The gentleman over there sort of stole the question that I wanted to ask, but I do have a two-part question. One, what makes your church special in terms of doing this type of work? Because I know you've tried to stay away from the size of the church, you know, you could be a small congregation at 100, and still be a convener. But there's something uniquely special about you in this whole sea of pastoral leaders across this region. So what makes you special to be able to stand here today and really provide a vision that I have personally been looking for out of pastoral leaders for a long time?

And, number two, you have a workforce development component that you built, but what about the wealth creation part? Are you going to pivot at some point in time to create the manufacturers out of that portfolio that you have that will actually go out and create those jobs?

DR. BRAZIER: The first question I believe comes down to some of my uniqueness and background. I ended my commercial career with IBM as a business unit executive, where I handled public sectors and did very well. And I was a chief information officer for the Chicago Housing Authority for a few years before I went into the ministry. And so when you couple my theological degree with my business acumen, and you bring the two strategic pieces together, it kind of gives you a flavor for that.

And I say that without taking my calling and divine intervention into play. It's not just me. The things that we were able to do actually worked out.

And then your second question dealt with when do we pivot? That is a part of our next -- we have two more, two or three more initiatives that we have. One deals with how do we create more franchisees from franchisers, so that those who have backgrounds can actually own a franchise, and how do we help fund them?

The second is that we make the three buildings that I

talked to you about revenue centers, and these are profit centers that then continue to feed into our education and safety and economic development programming.

And then the third is that we will take on additional manufacturing lines, and we will actually have -- we will then probably have a greater capacity for jobs. But our primary effort in our workforce development is to place the 90 residents that we train every year into jobs in manufacturing, wherever they may be. If they're in North Carolina, if they're in Omaha, it doesn't matter where they are. These people will be trained and certified to be robotic controllers.

Maybe because I was turned this way, maybe I should turn this way. I don't want to leave anybody out. I'm actually heavily right-handed so it's easy for me to kind of shift that way. Thank you very much.

MS. O'BRIEN: Well, we are at the half-way point. It's lunchtime. So I want you to be able to get, grab your plates and then do some quick networking, and we're going to reconvene with an NPO panel at 12:15. We tried to pack as much content into this day as possible. But we will reconvene at 12:15. Thank you.

(END)