

Philadelphia and the world

There was a time that nearly everything we might use in our daily lives was made somewhere in the city or region. Philadelphia was known as the workshop of the world. Locomotives were made at the sprawling Baldwin plant just north of Center City. Hats were made by the Stetson Co. up at 5th and Jefferson. Saw blades were made by the Disston Saw Works in Tacony.

Food was also largely local in nature. Even during my time in Philadelphia, which began in 1974, tomatoes were something you had in the summer because they would come from South Jersey.

The world has changed in the span of a few decades. Digital technology, and advanced air and sea transport have collapsed time and space, allowing us to live in a global world. Significant events anywhere are beamed into our homes, computers and cell phones in real time. While the world has opened up to us, it has also brought with it the sometimes alarming/sometimes exhilarating reality that in order to thrive, we must compete globally.

We have spent a great deal of time thinking through what global competition means for Philadelphia. The challenge for us is to understand and exploit our natural assets, making them known and attractive to outsiders who are willing to invest here. Fifty years ago, those assets were mainly our manufacturing breadth.

Our greatest assets today, however, rest with our institutions of education, research and medicine. We have one of the highest concentrations of such institutions in the world. They represent our largest employers and collectively, represent nearly one-third of our work force.

They also represent our greatest exports. Our institutions are in the knowledge business. They manufacture ideas, but instead of largely selling them to a customer base elsewhere, they bring the customers — in the form of students, researchers and faculty — here to Philadelphia. In the process, the customers not only buy the 'product,' but they also put money into our economy as



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Alan
Greenberger

they rent houses, buy food and use transportation.

Because so many of our institutions are world class, they draw their base from all corners of the world. From Chinese businessmen taking a five-week course at Wharton, to a Mexican family whose child needs special surgery at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, to a leading Italian cancer researcher who joined the Wistar Institute, our institutions connect us globally. On a trip to Turkey last year, we were on a hot-air balloon trip. Our Egyptian pilot asked where everyone was from and when we said Philadelphia, he informed us that he had a master's degree from Temple in engineering! 'Go Owls,' he bellowed as he lit the fire that lifted the balloon.

Such connections extend our reputation and not only bring us students, but also bring us immigrants burning for the opportunities that America offers. They bring businesspeople interested in commercializing research done here and they bring us tourists who, in my experience, almost always know the extraordinary history that was made in Philadelphia.

So the world has changed. It is incumbent on us to welcome foreigners, whether they be tourists, guests, business people, students, colleagues, or investors; to encourage them to stay; and in the process show ourselves to be the cosmopolitan city that we actually are.

ALAN GREENBERGER is deputy mayor for economic development of the city of Philadelphia. This column is part of a monthly series by the Global Philadelphia Association entitled "Philadelphia — The Once and Future International City."