

Maybe Louisville's possibilities can replace misconceptions

by B. Todd Bright

Louisville has water. I only mention this because it came up in a conversation I had recently about our city with an out-of-towner.

At a luncheon I attended not so long ago, I was sitting with people from across the country. The overdeveloped sense of ambassadorship that all Louisvillians possess was fully engaged.

It is easy for Louisville natives and transplants to talk about Louisville because our citizens are passionate about our community.

To my left sat a media executive from Seattle. It was time to turn on the hometown charm with a little conversation about the 'Ville.

So, I asked: "How are you enjoying Louisville?"

With a roll of the eyes and a quick huff to convey her complete disgust, she replied, "It is terrible. I would never live here or anywhere in the South for that matter."

Using my keen observational skills, I could tell she was on the fence about her feelings. However, with my help we were going to put her on the path to be a lover of Louisville.

I followed up with a diplomatic question both demonstrating thoughtfulness and empathy, a question worthy of international diplomats prepared to solve the challenges of divided nations. "What is it that you don't like?"

This must be what it is like to be Henry Kissinger. I was in the zone.

"You don't have water" was her reply.

Now that is just silly.

I have lived here my whole life, and I am keenly aware that water is the primary reason we keep trying to build bridges.

If it weren't for all the water in the middle of this town, we would have nothing to paint. Water is essential to the character of our city.

My inner-Kissinger was no longer being channeled. That excuse just felt bogus, and I wasn't going to let my hometown get knocked without a good reason.

So, I replied: "Are you sure? Because I flushed this morning and everything seemed fine. Maybe it was just the plumbing in your room. Have you called the front desk?"

"It isn't just the water. You don't have trees, either."

Huh? Somebody form a task force. Those in the great Northwest think we don't have trees or water.

We need a sign. Let me be the first to propose a banner be placed on the Sherman Minton Bridge, reading: "Welcome to Louisville: You are driving over water. Trees are on your right."

Later during the luncheon, my Seattle friend started talking to the person on her left, an advertising guy from Tucson.

At the mere mention of the word Tucson, my friend lets out a shout of joy. "I love Tucson. I used to live there. I would love to live there again."

Must be because of all the trees and water.

It always has been my impression that Louisville is where Midwestern practicality meets Southern hospitality. With few exceptions, it is my belief that once people visit Louisville, they leave impressed with our few acres of earth.

Lush green landscapes are a nearby pleasant escape from a growing and vital downtown. You are 20 minutes from everywhere. Neighborhoods still matter and optimism is universal.

Our town is eclectic, convenient, warm and welcoming. If you don't love Louisville, you simply aren't trying.

I know it. You know it And I think everyone else should know it, too. That is why I was excited to observe the happenings of the Louisville Branding Project. It was a massive undertaking and members of our creative community stepped up.

Perhaps it is the marketer in me, but I love watching the creative process unfold. Our group was treated to the results of penetrating research, ideas and ultimately insight into the madness that is method when seeking out a brand.

More akin to an archeological dig than a chemistry lab concoction, it was artfully explained that the creative task at hand was not to fashion from thin air the Louisville brand as much as it was to reveal it.

Louisville has a brand; we just needed to claim it. And here is where we chose to plant our flag. Louisville: It's possible here.

As a Louisville native, I view myself as a product of this community. The brand that my hometown brings with it is important to me.

My hope for the brand was simple: Please don't let it suck.

My expectations were low, but soon those expectations were far surpassed. The first time I heard brand theme, I smiled. It is exactly what I had always felt about Louisville but didn't quite know how to express.

After months of work, the branding team assembled by Greater Louisville Inc., our metro chamber of commerce, had perfectly articulated the essence of Louisville -- "possibility."

So, to my new friend in Seattle I say, I am sorry our city didn't meet your exacting standards. I hope you will give us another try.

I promise you Louisville is special. No matter what you want in a city, it's possible here. If you don't believe me, you can ask anyone here.

We all know it, we all feel it, and now we know how to say it. Anything is possible in my hometown -- including trees and water.

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