



RESURGENT RESILIENT SIOUX CITY

As the sun rises and a crisp October breeze sweeps through the brightly colored autumn leaves, an American Indian chief is perched high atop a bluff watching over the vast forests and fields of the river valley below.

His steely gaze permanently affixed on the confluence of the unusually high waters of the Big Sioux and Missouri rivers, he stands some 13 feet tall with ceremonial pipe and flowing headdress silhouetted against a blaze orange sky. A century and a half after he drew his final breath, War Eagle, now a larger-than-life steel sculpture, remains a fixture in Sioux City.



Community Focus

RANKED FIRST IN THE NATION

Initially home to the tribes War Eagle led and later a river trading post frequented by fur trappers, Sioux City's early settlers anticipated unlimited growth for the region. That early enthusiasm was initially contagious, but over time optimism waxed and waned with the predictability of a 19th century lunar eclipse. Once a blue-collar river town as rough and tumble as any in the state, in the last two decades this agribusiness and food-processing center has quietly shed its gritty exterior, spruced up its image, and become one of the top business locations in the nation. In fact, in two of the last three years, the Sioux City metro has been recognized by *Site Selection* magazine as the top economic development community in the United States for communities with populations under 200,000.

Sioux City's transformation has been steady and the results have been impressive. With the addition of new companies and numerous local expansions, the community continues to promote growth by aggressively investing in economic development initiatives and quality-of-life amenities. Thanks in part to the four lane expansion of Iowa Highway 60 connecting communities throughout northwest Iowa, Sioux City has also emerged as regional leader in the commercial and retail sectors.

While the area's outlook remains relatively bright, attitudes were not always rosy. The 1980s farm crisis, the closure of the largest stockyards in the world, and the regional demise of one of the largest global computer makers invited pessimism. Historically speaking, Sioux City may have had reason to look at the glass as half empty; the city's legacy is literally borne of tragedy. The glorious American Indian culture and way of life was shattered in the 1800s, and decades before the community's founding, Sergeant Charles Floyd succumbed to appendicitis here, the sole fatality on the Lewis and Clark expedition. But persistence in the face of adversity would become the calling card of the dedicated founders who established Sioux City and it remains a hallmark of the indomitable spirit of the people who continue to call this community home today.

COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

While locals identify a variety of noteworthy features that help define the community, Sioux City remains best known to most outsiders for the community's heroic and compassionate response in the aftermath of the tragic crash of United Flight 232 in July of 1989.



Photo courtesy of the Siouxland Chamber of Commerce

Statue of a fighter pilot who rescued a young boy after the crash of United Flight 232 in Sioux City in 1989.

George Boykin, chairman of the Woodbury County Board of Supervisors, recalls the events of that fateful summer. "We were all devastated by the loss of life that occurred and nothing will ever change that," Boykin began. After a pause he continued, "However, that tragedy revealed the true caliber and character of the citizens of this community."

When word went out that a large commercial aircraft was disabled and might crash at the Sioux City Airport, off-duty doctors and nurses dropped what they were doing and hurried to the hospitals to help. Average citizens rushed to the blood bank and so overwhelming was that response that the lines to donate blood literally encircled a city block. Countless health care professionals representing the community's two hospitals, Mercy Medical Center and St. Luke's Regional Medical Center, quickly established a triage with regional disaster response personnel and members of the 185th Iowa Air National Guard. Their coordinated response saved many lives that day.

City officials acknowledge that people from around the nation, including site selection consultants looking to locate operations for expanding companies, seem to

PERSISTENCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY WOULD BECOME THE CALLING CARD OF THE DEDICATED FOUNDERS WHO ESTABLISHED SIOUX CITY.

recollect the 232 disaster and also remember the city's coordinated and heartfelt response. So compelling were those events that a made-for-television movie starring Hollywood legends Charlton Heston, James Coburn, and Richard Thomas was filmed on-site a few years later. After the film aired on nationwide television, local folks began to reminisce, and many were left feeling that Sioux City just might be a pretty unique and special place after all.

SEASON OF CHANGE

Not long after that crash, a small computer company started to make big waves in Siouland. "At roughly the same time Gateway became a leader in the personal computer industry, the region was swept with a sea of goodwill, philanthropy, and renewed optimism," says Siouland Chamber of Commerce president Debi Durham. Along with a dedicated core of corporate, government, and community leaders, Durham harnessed that energy and remarkable changes began to take shape. Among the many projects undertaken at that time were the development of a more accessible and attractive Riverfront and Anderson Dance Pavilion, with a garden dedicated to both those who perished and those who survived Flight 232. Additionally, Sioux City deliberately invested in numerous quality-of-life projects including a completely restored Orpheum Theatre, the Tyson Events Center arena, establishment of the leading blues festival in the upper Midwest, an entirely refurbished city park and associated band

"At roughly the same time Gateway became a leader in the personal computer industry, the region was swept with a sea of goodwill, philanthropy, and renewed optimism."

Debi Durham
President, Siouland Chamber of Commerce

shell, construction of a new and endowed Art Center, and one of the top rock climbing walls in the central U.S., as well as the reemergence of a decaying business, entertainment, and restaurant district.

Much of this development was aided by Gateway's meteoric rise in the 1990s. As the computer maker grew into a multibillion dollar company employing approximately 6,000 people from throughout the Siouland area, the Sioux City economy experienced spectacular and unprecedented growth. Unfortunately, the "roaring '90s" in Sioux City were followed by the



Photo courtesy of City of Sioux City

A young family enjoys one of the many unique gallery exhibits hosted at the Sioux City Art Center.



Community Focus

“Sioux City built the first certified Boundless Playground in Iowa and this is something we are extremely proud of as it directly reflects the priorities of this community.”

Debi Durham
President, Siouxland Chamber of Commerce



Photo courtesy of Aurora Photography, Chadd Cusmann

Sioux City was the first city in Iowa to construct and certify a “Boundless Playground” for physically challenged children.

sobering reality that Gateway’s star eventually faded, distressing the community economically and eventually surrendering all of the 6,000 jobs.

Nevertheless, the community persevered, dusted itself off and went right back to work looking for new ideas and unique ways to distinguish itself. One of Durham’s favorite such projects is a “Boundless Playground” or a park where children, including those with physical challenges, can all play together in a safe, handicapped accessible environment. “Sioux City built the first certified Boundless Playground in Iowa and this is something we are extremely proud of, as it directly reflects the priorities of this community,” explained Durham.

INVESTMENTS PAY OFF

Numerous quality-of-life investments over the last fifteen years were specifically calculated to enhance the attractiveness of Sioux City in hopes that these projects would ultimately assist company recruitment and economic development efforts. While many communities ponder whether to invest in quality-of-life initiatives to attract companies or whether to attract companies and subsequently invest in quality of life, Sioux City does not. In considering whether the economic development “chicken or the egg” should come first, Sioux City decided to proactively invest in itself and the results have been exceptional.

In 2006, the Sioux City metro cracked *Site Selection* magazine’s prestigious top-ten list for the first time. That year, Sioux City ranked #3 on the list recognizing the top economic development communities in the United States with populations under 200,000 people. After that top-three performance, Sioux City redoubled its efforts and earned the top ranking in both 2007 and 2008, and ranked #2 in 2009. Recognition as the top economic development community in the United States for two consecutive years and ranking in the top three for four years in a row was welcome news for a community that had worked diligently to become a more welcoming and warm location for businesses and families alike.

“RENAISSANCE REGION”

Local business executive David Bernstein, who serves on the Iowa Department of Economic Development Board of Directors, believes Sioux City’s best days are still ahead. “For the last decade we have had a unique landscape that is both proactive and bipartisan and that leverages both public and private partnerships to continue to grow Sioux City from a business and cultural perspective. We are planning for and investing in our future and our vision for Sioux City is becoming a reality,” stated Bernstein. For this reason, few were surprised when former Governor Tom Vilsack described the community as a “renaissance region” or when the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs named Sioux City one of Iowa’s initial “Great Places.”

top economic development community

RECOGNITION AS THE **TOP ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY** IN THE UNITED STATES FOR TWO CONSECUTIVE YEARS AND **RANKING IN THE TOP THREE** FOR FOUR YEARS IN A ROW WAS WELCOME NEWS FOR A COMMUNITY THAT HAS WORKED DILIGENTLY TO BECOME A **WELCOMING AND WARM LOCATION FOR BUSINESSES AND FAMILIES ALIKE.**



Photo courtesy of Aurora Photography, Chadd Goosmann

*(above) The Roth Fountain, complete with terra-cotta accents, is located in the center of a transformed downtown district.
(below right) The ISU Design West Studios are housed in a totally renovated and converted steam boiler plant in downtown Sioux City.*

One of the primary reasons for the “Great Places” designation was the recognition of and reinvestment in the downtown district’s historic architecture. Led by local university president, Bev Wharton, and a twenty-something Iowa State graduate with a Masters Degree in Architecture from Cornell University in New York, Sioux City’s “Great Places” strategy focused on possibilities and the promotion of the city’s unique terra-cotta building accents. Nathan Kalaher, Sioux City’s twenty-something architect, emphasized, “Few people realize the incredible architectural treasures located throughout Siouxland. Believe it or not, there is a rich tapestry of intriguing buildings which merit study right here in our own backyard.” With several buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, Kalaher believed Sioux City’s architectural heritage was quite unique and worthy of graduate level study. Such was his contention when he personally proposed the creation of a graduate level architectural program to be located in Sioux City in cooperation with Iowa State University.

Fast forward a few years and Iowa State now calls the Design West Studio in downtown Sioux City home to their western Iowa satellite for architecture



Photo courtesy of Aurora Photography, Chadd Goosmann

“Few people realize the incredible architectural treasures located throughout Siouxland. Believe it or not, there is a rich tapestry of intriguing buildings which merit study right here in our own backyard.”

Nathan Kalaher
Sioux City Architect

and other design studies. Located in one of the oldest buildings in Sioux City, the 1890s facility was actually an antiquated and dilapidated steam-boiler plant that lacked electricity until the recent ISU update. Not only did Kalaher initially pitch the idea but he eventually served as the designer for the archaic structure’s renovation. As a result, another abandoned building is serving a functional purpose and contributing to the rebirth of the downtown district. Not surprisingly to those who are familiar with the building, in 2008 the American Institute of Architects of Iowa recognized the building with the state’s highest award, the Honor Award for Design Excellence.

BUILDING ON THE PAST

Such is Sioux City’s connection with the past. Whether promoting the legacy of War Eagle or reinvesting in historic architecture, Sioux City’s ties to the past are quite evident. When local developer Bart Connelly purchased the Evans Block Building, which was built in 1890 and housed Northwestern National Bank, not even he fathomed how successful his vision would become. Connelly explained, “This building has a fascinating historical legacy and I was convinced that we could breathe new life into it. The real trick was modernizing it for contemporary use while respecting the structure’s rich and storied history.” This was Connelly’s task when he converted the building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, from a boarded-up former home of an outlaw biker gang to the distinguished and scholarly looking headquarters of a leading local law firm.

Investment in historic architecture is now the rage in this city of 85,000 people. No less than eighteen aging buildings have been or are in the process of being



Photo courtesy of GR Lindblade & Co.

The opulent Orpheum Theatre, built in 1927, underwent an \$11 million renovation and was reopened in 2001.

totally renovated and restored. The historic and once red-tagged Badgerow Building, which was initially known as “the Monarch of the City,” is undergoing a \$10 million transformation. The first floor of a former JC Penney’s department store will house the new public museum and the second floor is already home to a 300-agent customer service center for Delta Airlines. A moving and storage warehouse is now home to an architectural firm and loft apartments. A car dealership will become a brand new children’s museum, and an aging music store is being converted into a law firm.

Local developer Rick Bertrand is in the midst of tackling a two block restoration of eight decaying structures in the downtown district and has already signed leases on seven of them: a coffee and donut shop, an Irish pub, art studio, wine bar, photo gallery, optometrist’s office, and an engineering firm. Bertrand, who is a 40-year-old native of Sioux City, is also running for a seat in the Iowa State Senate and repeatedly insists that he is bullish on Sioux City and the state of Iowa. Milt Avery, a partner in Avery Brothers, a 75-year-old local sign business, expressed admiration for Bertrand’s bold ideas. “It’s easy to talk a good game about creating jobs and promoting economic development, but this guy is putting his money where his mouth is and investing over a million and a half dollars of his own money in his hometown.”

COW TOWN WITH AN OPERA HOUSE

Perhaps no building revival impacted the community like the renovation of the stunning Orpheum Theatre in the heart of the downtown district, which recently hosted Iowa’s first gubernatorial debate. Once a grand and opulent performing arts venue hosting the likes of Katherine Hepburn and Fred Astaire, the building fell into disrepair due to neglect in the ’70s and ’80s and was permanently closed nearly twenty years ago. But like so much of the adversity that visits this community, this story too has a happy ending.

Originally built in 1927, the Orpheum was mothballed and nearly forgotten for the better part of a decade. Fortunately, a few leaders with a passion for the community and the performing arts launched an initiative to study the feasibility of restoring the Orpheum Theatre to its original grandeur and glory. After retaining some of the leading experts in the industry, Sioux City learned that rehabbing the 2,500 seat venue was possible, but doing it right, as those involved insisted on doing, would be both costly and time-consuming. With the help of a community thriving financially due to Gateway’s success, \$11 million was raised and a comprehensive plan, respecting the theatre’s original elegance right down to the wallpaper and paint, was developed and ultimately executed.

“Whether working with people on community improvement, charitable causes, or responding to a disaster of some kind, there is nowhere I would rather be and no people I would rather be with than Sioux Cityans.”

Tom Padgett
City Council Member

After two years, the painstakingly detailed and difficult remodeling project was finished and the “Grand Reopening” became one of the most anticipated community events in years. A black-tie gala was planned and legendary comedian Bill Cosby was scheduled to be the first performer to grace the new stage. As the festivities approached, tragedy would once again intervene. This time the terrorist attacks of Tuesday, September 11, would require the postponement of nearly all events from coast to coast. City councilman Tom Padgett remembered the community’s response in those dark and uncertain days immediately after 9/11. “There was a great deal of apprehension, but the community rallied and quickly united as I have seen these citizens do on many, many occasions in the past. Whether working with people on community improvement, charitable causes, or responding to a disaster of some kind, there is nowhere I would rather be and no people I would rather be with than Sioux Cityans.”

Resolute in the face of adversity, Sioux City waited for a more appropriate time to reopen the theatre and Mr. Cosby’s inaugural appearance was rescheduled. Since then, the Orpheum has welcomed countless entertainers, singers, comedians, bands, Broadway shows, soloists, dancers, celebrities, and musicians. From Cosby to Jerry Seinfeld, B.B. King to James Taylor, *Cats* to *Mama Mia*, the Moscow Ballet to Riverdance, and Barack Obama to John McCain, they’ve all been to Sioux City’s majestic Orpheum Theatre in the last decade and helped resuscitate a slumbering giant.

AGRIBUSINESS & FOOD-PROCESSING LEADER

Another dozing giant that has recently awakened is the region’s agribusiness and food-processing core. For generations agribusiness and food processing have been Siouxlant’s bread and butter, and never has this been more important than in the present economic recession. In July of 2010, *Business Facilities* magazine ranked Sioux City the top food-processing metro in the country for the second year in a row. With millions of dollars in infrastructure investments and hundreds of acres of land precertified as shovel ready for development in the Bridgeport West and Southbridge Business Park locations, Sioux City has confirmed its commitment

“We never really looked at expanding anywhere other than in Sioux City. This community has been very good to us and our employees are simply among the best and most dedicated you’ll find anywhere in the nation.”

Garry Smith, President, American Pop Corn Company

to economic development and defending its recent national rankings.

But Sioux City and particularly the agribusiness and food-processing industries will not emerge from the current recession unscathed. In April, John Morrell closed a pork processing plant eliminating 1,450 jobs and this summer Terra, a leading producer of nitrogen-based fertilizers, was the victim of a hostile takeover that resulted in the elimination of executive management positions. “We’ve handled plenty of adversity before,” reflected Durham. “Sioux City has some of the hardest working and most determined people in the world. I have no doubt that this community will overcome these latest setbacks, just as we have so many others.”

Leading the latest comeback is the American Pop Corn Company, which announced a \$6 million expansion in August. Best known for producing and selling Jolly Time Microwave Pop Corn, company president Garry Smith, who will soon assume the role of chairman of the community’s regional economic development group, disclosed, “We never really looked at expanding anywhere other than in Sioux City. This

community has been very good to us and our employees are simply among the best and most dedicated you’ll find anywhere in the nation.”

Sioux City consistently boasts about its workforce. Durham, whose regional economic development organization, The Siouxland Initiative, was ranked among the top ten economic development groups in the nation in both 2008 and 2009, is quick to point out that a high-caliber labor force is key to successfully recruiting and retaining companies. “We have an outstanding community and that begins with the quality of our people,” said Durham. “Hard-working, honest, and without a hint of pretense, perhaps not unlike the determined people who originally called this area home. Maybe that’s why companies choose to locate in Sioux City.”

The sun has now dipped beneath the horizon and as another day draws to a close on the western border of Iowa, War Eagle remains at his post nestled in the Loess Hills overlooking the city. As a harvest moon rises over his shoulders, the Sioux chief stands silently, watching over this community of very resilient Iowans.

stands silently,
this community ...

the Sioux chief
watching over

For more information on opportunities and business incentives in Sioux City, contact
The Siouxland Initiative
101 Pierce St. ~ Sioux City, IA 51101
800-228-7903
www.sioxlandchamber.com

Bamboo is a symbol of luck and success for three reasons: its rapid growth, its strength and its resilience. All three are essential to growing your company. Call us today for more information on how this tri-state area can bring your company growth, strength and resilience.

Are you ready for your company to grow?



Space that is Move-In Ready



Educated and Trained Work Force



Land with Infrastructure

We are!


Siouxland
Chamber
of Commerce


The Siouxland
Initiative

Contact Us
800.228.7903
www.siuoxlandchamber.com