



## Staples Business Group shares positive message

By Mary Stangle-Hess  
Co-Chair  
Staples Business Group

I want to share with you some of the thoughts of our July 28, Business Group's guest speaker, David Evert from STEP (Stimulating Economic Progress) in Wadena. David validated for us many of the thoughts, ideas and concerns that we have shared and identified some key points which can make the difference in the success or failure of our efforts. Below are the ideas which we need to keep in the forefront of our minds as we go through this huge change in our community.

1. While on this journey, we need to remind ourselves that it doesn't matter who gets the credit for progress and success. We are a team. We are in this as a community and there is no room for a power struggle.

2. None of us are in this for the money. None of us are getting paid. Our goal should be to make a difference, not to make dollars. If each of us put in one hour per week in any area of progress, think of the difference we could make.

3. There is a huge difference between controlling and empowering. It is human nature to want to control our surroundings. It is something totally different to empower ourselves and others to see that our dreams, ideas and needs as a community are realized. If each of us would let go of the need to control our environment and unleash this tremendous potential, the world better look out. It doesn't mean we have to agree - it just means that everyone is equal and each idea should be accepted and discussed.

4. It is the city government's job to govern. That is what they are there for. We have elected many of our government officials, hence we have some ownership in the manner in which they govern. It is also our responsibility as individuals, citizens and business owners to be involved in the governing process. We can sit together and complain about what is happening, or we can channel that energy into making a difference. Every one of us will disagree at some point with decisions made by our government - whether city, state or federal. The key is that when we disagree, it becomes our responsibility to voice our concern. If we don't, we have no right to complain. I believe our city government is doing the very best they can. We have a beautiful new police station and will soon have a state of the art city government office and library. We are dressing up our

town and need to continue to move forward with this effort. We cannot go back to what we were in the past. While everyone is making every effort to preserve our beautiful historic ambience, we must move forward and do it with teamwork and cohesiveness.

5. We, as a community, need to identify our goal. The city, economic development authority, health care system, school system, chamber of commerce, businesses and citizens must identify where we are going and make a firm plan to get there. We have so many groups going in so many different directions, it's hard to identify the finish line. We have tried in the past to do this, but we need to do it again and again and again if we need to in order to succeed. We all need to be on the same page and harness our energy and effort. We have so much talent, potential and energy in this community that it's overwhelming to think about.

6. Two of the main ingredients stalling this process are greed and fear. Again, human nature takes over. Everyone wants to succeed and everyone needs to be validated. But when we do it for personal gain rather than community progress, we falter. There are also many of us who fear change and the future. It is far more comfortable to stay in our familiar surroundings than to venture into unknown territory. But, there is absolutely no going back and we MUST move forward. It is unsettling and upsetting at times, but we should be here to support each other and work through it together. We have the opportunity here to reinvent our future.

7. Everyone is struggling right now. We all need support. We should not be afraid or too proud to share our struggles with each other. There is help out there and many of us have resources that we are more than willing to share. We want and need each other to succeed. We don't want empty storefronts and black holes in our downtown area and community in general. We want to restore the pride and positive attitude that once flourished in this booming little town.

Now, what we do with this information is up to us. Let's all put our differences aside and work for the common good of our community. If there are any ideas, questions, concerns, or criticisms that you need to share, here is your golden opportunity. Talk to each other. Come to the next business group meeting. Go to the next city council meeting. Join and help your chamber of commerce achieve success. We can do this.

## Letters to the Editor

### Vote no on school levy

I write this in response to an article by Mr. Mark Schmitz, Superintendent, Staples Motley Schools, in your July 30 edition of Staples World.

First I will tell you as the reader, that any statistical information in this letter was collected from a site called city-data.com and is from the year 2007.

I would like to know just how much more of our money that the county, city, and school system thinks that they can squeeze out of our property tax base. We are currently witnessing the construction of an ill timed at best new city hall on the heels of the completion of our new city police headquarters, neither of which were as urgent a need as our city officials would like you to believe.

During the last fiscal year, we have seen an inordinate across the board increase in our county and city portions of our property taxes. Here are a few little facts about our city tax base.

As of the year 2007, the property tax rate for the City of Staples was 1.4 percent far above the state average of 1.1 percent, and the highest of any city in the state with a population from 2,800 to 3,400 (within 300 people above or below ours).

The average single family dwelling was valued at \$88,700, compared to the state average of \$213,600, and the closest I could find to our property values, again within 300 people one way or the other. . . nearly \$20,000 higher than values in the City of Staples. Makes me wonder aloud why our city officials are on this insane spending spree.

I know what you are thinking. . . "The county and city just reassessed my property, it's now worth much more than in 2007."

Well, you have to ask yourself, according to whom? If you have seen a recent influx in home sales and construction, please by all means let me know. Otherwise I will assume it is an artificial inflation. If the city wants to buy my house for the assessed value, write me a check.

Now, couple the high tax rate with the low property values, and the resulting lack of a tax base, then let's throw in our average income. The average household income in the City of Staples is \$29,369, the state average \$55,802. The percentage of residents with an income below poverty level in Staples is 20.3 percent. Yes, one in every five, and nearly three times the states percentage of 7.9 percent.

The number of residents with an income less than half of the poverty level in Staples 5.3 percent, the state 3.2 percent. So, not only do we not have the property values for an adequate tax base, but also do not have the income to support any tax increase, much less an increase for unneeded building projects, such as a new police headquarters and a new city hall.

While I sympathize with the school's need for upkeep on its buildings, there are many residents, who need to do upkeep on their property also. Some, like a few of my neighbors, have had no choice but to put money that they may or may not have into their houses. . . thank you, Staples "beautification." I am sure that they have already been assessed on those improvements.

I just simply do not believe that we as a city population can afford any

additional increases in our property taxes. This levy simply cannot be allowed to pass. Through no fault of the school, its teachers or its board members, the funds our school gets are not going where needed. Unfunded federal and state mandates and misguided legislation like the "No Child Left Behind" act have shifted the funds to programs and staffing requirements that are irresponsible at best. Basically too much of the money is going to too few of the students.

Also, until the per student funding in rural Minnesota equals the per student funding in the Metro Area, I do not believe it wise for us to waste any more of our tax money on state mandates, no matter how well intended. Presently the formula used to distribute funding is weighted so that schools with a larger enrollment receive higher per student funding based on the assumption that it costs more to educate in a larger school. Studies show that this is not only false, but also exactly the opposite. It costs much more per student to educate in a smaller school system.

I am not saying that our school buildings are not in need of repair, and I do not wish to make it sound as though a levy is ill intended, just poorly timed, and at the moment, not feasible given the state of our economy, especially our local economy. There is much that needs to be fixed in our schools, not just the buildings, and while administrators, and teachers are doing the absolute best that they can, we cannot just throw more money at the problem.

Until the state and federal governments allow our elected board members, and school officials to run our school and use the funding as they see fit, and equalize the funding to do so, I cannot support any more local tax money going to our school. So please show up and vote no on the proposed levy on Sept. 8.

Mike Isenberg  
Staples, Minn.



## Letters to the Editor

### A rail safety issue

As a former resident

and long time observer of your community I'm surprised and a bit embarrassed about the gridlock and animosity that seems to plague much of the local decision making process.

In 1990, I attempted to convince Phil Anderson, a former mayor, that a "whistle free" zone would be a real benefit to the community. Since railroad traffic moves slower through Staples than other communities, I reasoned, it would allow train crews ample time to alert vehicles and pedestrians of impending danger. Mr. Anderson thought it was a bad idea.

Regardless of the redundancy that has been built into the crossing safety system over the years, industry insiders are continually amazed at the lengths individuals will go to end their lives. Some traverse high fences, others drive headlong into oncoming trains. Last year one individual placed his neck delicately under the rolling boxcar wheel. So be it. It's time for the naysayers of Staples to take a collective leap of faith and embrace this quiet zone concept. For too long polite, pa-

tient leaders of the community have been duped by unscrupulous corporate salesmen in concert with federal and state officials. Government largess for underpasses and other special projects curiously ends up in the politically connected communities.

Trains currently operate at high speeds without whistles through Sartell, St. Cloud and Coon Rapids. Likewise, whistles are prohibited in Fargo, Moorhead and Little Falls. Why not Staples?

Here is an opportunity for the community to get really incensed about an issue together. I envision a grand coalition of red necks, anarchists, mad mothers and leftists filling the streets of Staples and demanding an end to this foolishness that has bedeviled the city for too long.

The city council should proclaim Railroad Days 2010 as the deadline. Succeed in your mission by then. You don't want to become another community that talks big, debates long and does little.

Charles Huff  
Fargo, N.D.

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