



## Selling the young on staying here

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*Author: Regina Brett, Plain Dealer Columnist*

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Jim Rogerson thought Cleveland was dying, until he saw the city through the eyes of others.

He's lived in Greater Cleveland his whole life but had no idea what the area offered until he ended up in the Leadership Cleveland Class of 2011.

"I'm seeing things I didn't even know were there," he said.

Jim had never been to Slavic Village, never seen the majestic St. Stanislaus Church. Once he did, he took his family there for Christmas Eve services.

He visited Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, which does laundry for businesses like the Cleveland Clinic using the latest green methods to protect the environment.

He saw the new student center at Cleveland State University and stopped by the Campus International School, a new Cleveland School District grade school where kindergartners sang to him in Mandarin.

"My kids need to know this stuff," Jim told himself.

Then he took it a step further: Everyone's kids need to know this.

Jim is tired of hearing adults talk about the brain drain, tired of young people saying, "I'm not going to stay. There's nothing here."

He's going to prove them wrong. He's spent the last five months putting together an event for 50 students called "Imagine Your Future: Think Cleveland."

"I don't want the kids to rule out Cleveland when trying to decide what they do after college," Jim said. "I want them to at least consider Cleveland."

Jim is president and owner of Therapy Partners, a 10-year-old company in Middleburg Heights that employs 400. It offers speech, physical and occupational therapy to nursing homes, retirement communities and outpatient clinics.

He has twin 16-year-old sons who are sophomores at Berea High School, from which he graduated. Jim talked to school Principal Vincenzo Ruggiero, who got behind the idea. They didn't approach the usual suspects, the big hospitals, because everyone already knows how great the area medical centers are.

"I wanted something cool, a hands-on experience, places where young people are working," Jim said.

On April 14, a school bus will take 50 students, mostly seniors and juniors, to three different sites.

The first stop is Swiger Coil, a manufacturing plant that makes coils for wind turbines and electric cars. Too many people think manufacturing is dying. Jim wants them to see how plants can be retooled to produce new things.

Next, students head to East Fourth Street, where developer Ari Maron will give them a tour and talk about community development projects. Maron transformed the decrepit East

Fourth Street area and created a vibrant entertainment district of nightclubs and restaurants where young people live, work and play.

The students will spend the rest of the day at Hyland Software, getting a tour, presentation, lunch and opportunity for job-shadowing. The company employs 1,000 young professionals.

"To the left, they'll see a pingpong table, and to the right, a pool table. There's a slide from the second floor to the first. All this creativity is going on," Jim said. "You don't have to take an elevator or wear stuffy suits and ties to work."

So far everyone he contacted has supported his efforts. If all goes well, it could become an annual event.

Jim wants to see the idea grow and spread across the region. He's not sure how to package the idea but hopes other schools can replicate it.

What a great concept. Kudos to Jim, the high school and these three participants for making it happen.

Wouldn't it be something if more students could imagine a future with Cleveland in it?

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To reach Regina Brett: [rbrett@plaind.com](mailto:rbrett@plaind.com), 216-999-6328

Previous columns online:

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