

Goldston Visits North Omaha to Evaluate Investment Climate

Although he visits home often, Nathaniel (Nate) Goldston III does not normally return to Omaha with such a critical eye. He took part in a whirlwind tour of the city recently to evaluate the climate for economic investment in North Omaha.

"I see a great opportunity for the city as it moves forward - opportunities that we can capitalize on and bring new life back into the African-American community." Goldston said he recognizes this new life taking shape in the form of Love's Jazz and Arts Center near 24th and Lake St. – a facility that he was not aware existed but pleasantly surprised to see. "It's really good to see this area of the city developing into a cultural center and I'd like to see more development coming in here," he said.

Goldston is CEO of Gourmet Services Inc. based in Atlanta, Georgia, which he founded in 1975 and has since developed into the largest minority-owned food service management business in the United States. Goldston's visit to Omaha was sponsored by the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. It was part of the on-going effort to supplement initial research for the North Omaha Development Project study.

Development and growth just happen to be the cornerstones of Goldston's multi-million dollar enterprise. During his first year in business, he secured contracts with six major colleges to generate over \$2 million in revenue.

"What I see about Omaha is that it's going to take special interest and investment, some of which is going to have to come from outside the community." There is a cadre of people who are willing to exert economic power towards redevelopment, he said. "I sense that there is at least an effort. I can't say it's a groundswell because I don't know how deep it runs. But there are some folks in the African-American community who are willing to step up to the plate and actually take a swing at this thing."

Goldston said the willingness to continue to revitalize the North Omaha community study area is absolutely incredible. "I think a very genuine effort is being made to bring North Omaha back to where used to be. It's not a bunch of smoke and mirrors," he added, "it's really something genuine on the part of the City, the Chamber and all those involved in the different projects here."

Many of the proper pieces are in place now. "And what I sense is a kind of seamless team. It's not disjointed. Everybody is working towards the same goal, which is the only way you can get it done," he said. Goldston went through the transformation of Atlanta and insists that without this crucial team spirit the desired outcome will remain just out of reach.

"Mentorship is the essential element that I'm trying to bring here – individuals with experience behind them to demonstrate that it can be done and what it will take." But he suggested the need for a new perception and an identity makeover, giving the greater consumer base reason to do business in the area.

"You've got to first bring back the rooftops," he said. "And when rooftops are in place then you have the opportunity to be able to attract the kinds of goods and services that are to benefit the broader community. But first things first; you have to really get that area cleaned up and get some people living in that area. And give them something attractive to live in- something they can be proud of. And I think it's a great location and a great opportunity to do just that.

But it returns to the notion of the chicken and the egg, which comes first? In this case the answer is obvious, the people must come first, then come the goods and services as a means a basic necessity as well as the generation of additional revenue.

But he added that to reverse that order would be a disservice to the community, which would not be prepared to take full advantage of the opportunity at hand. His advice to entrepreneurs and new potential business owners was to proceed with caution depending on the types of goods or services being provided. And yet, given the tools and resources being made available through the North Omaha Development Project, Goldston said that business owners might also move forward with confidence.

“The other side of it,” he added, “is getting in on the ground floor at the right time is a very good thing, too. So you have to weigh your options before you make your decision about entering the marketplace.”

The critical elements of location and access to capital were stressed as the success of many businesses may hinge on either or both. “What I have found is a tremendous amount of encouragement on the part of the City and the Chamber, and there are a lot of incentives for you to locate and develop various enterprises in North Omaha. And that's something you don't find in every city. Omaha has certainly put ‘shoulder to the wheel’ to make things happen.”

Goldston concluded by saying that his job now is to go back to Atlanta and create more interest in what's about to happen in his old community. Goldston acknowledged the tremendous opportunity is much more than he or any one person can ever manage individually. “What I think it needs as a catalyst is to rally more people like myself who have roots here, to come back and take a second look. Close your eyes, open them again and recognize the great opportunities that exist here.”

Learn more about the North Omaha Development Project and provide input at the July 19 meeting at Omaha North High School, 4410 North 36th St. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the Viking Center. An ADA accessible entrance is located at the northeast music hall door. For more information, call 346-5000 or check out the Web site at www.ProjectNorthOmaha.org.