

Hello,

Since deciding to open a restaurant in the Ashland KY area I have been amazed at the situations that I have encountered. So to all of you that live in the Ashland, Russell and Greenup area this should be a good read. More importantly to those who have a sincere interest in keeping a job here or in getting a job back. Also to those who own their own business's and may have their own stories to tell. Oh yes, it's going to be an eye opener that will be met by many with bewilderment and will perhaps bring a storm down upon me, because I'm fed up !

To start off, I originally intended to put my restaurant right near Bellefonte Hospital. If your familiar with the area I was going to put it right across from the pavilion in the big corner just past the Baptist Church going to the hospital. A beautiful location, owned by a person I knew and a good opportunity. I hired a local architect to draw up the site plans and went to the Russell Greenup joint building committee meeting. We were told not to even submit the application because they didn't want us to waste our money. So rather than take a look at our plans and think about putting \$1 million facility in the location that would create 25-50 full and part time jobs, they just said don't waste your money. I also expressed the fact that the tax revenue for the area would greatly help, no difference, we were courteously dealt with and courteously dismissed with our plans never even being opened.

I was directed to my current location in the Park Place building. After meeting the owner and doing some research my family was considering buying the building in downtown Ashland. We had intended to go through the SBA and local banks to obtain funding. Our attorney set up a specific LLC for the purchase of the property. Through our research, we became aware of grants that were available to help older, distressed or decaying properties within city limits, we weren't sure if we would qualify, but thought we would contact the city to see if there were any ways to obtain help with our project. I delivered a copy of the appraisal to the City office. Our plan was to do a rehab on the outside of the building by cleaning the glass well and painting the steel and iron work, which is rusted and deteriorating. We would also re-do all the bathrooms on each floor, install new carpet and fresh paint on the occupied floors and build out the remaining floors as we attracted larger leases.

When I contacted the city to first inform them of my plans above and then to ask if there were any forms of assistance to rehab the building, such as interest free loans, grants, tax relief for a few years, anything that might help us revive downtown Ashland. This is the answer I was given by the Economic Development Director of the city:

I tell you what I'll do, give me a call if you have a broken sidewalk to repair or a dead tree that needs to be removed other than that, good luck to you

Understand a few more things, with my purchase of the building, the city would have gained an additional \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year just in property taxes, which I made sure was understood and it was. I would have taken one of the largest buildings in downtown Ashland and given it a facelift and worked to attract new jobs to the city by having appropriate office space. Along with buying the building we were ALSO putting the restaurant in.

A very important side note, in my research to purchase the building I became aware of this situation: A few years back a large engineering firm that does work for the refinery was going to lease the top floor of the Park Place Bldg. This would have brought over 100 White collared, professional service jobs into downtown Ashland. The deal hinged on a minor tax issue to be adjusted. The city refused to make the adjustment. The deal was presented to Frankfort and they apparently approved it or were willing to. Because of Ashland's failure to support this Corporation brining its 100 and more jobs to Ashland, someone else built them their own building out by the refinery where a long term lease was signed, outside city limits. Imagine the revenue these jobs would have brought to downtown Ashland. Professional services, food, printing, gas stations, shopping, fitness, groceries, car dealerships, car rentals and many more services would have gained by these 100 or more professionals located right downtown.

Well, we didn't try very hard to buy the building after that. Why would we mortgage our home and most of what we had to invest in something that would be given no support by the city it was located in ?

Next we have my food truck. Many people may have seen our food truck located around town briefly. I had this food truck custom built to meet or exceed every possible certification or qualification. The city charged me to become operational and then will not allow me to operate. The food truck was parked at ACTC and I got a call from the City's Economic Development Director telling me I had to shut down immediately. The reason I was given was that there is a city ordinance that says my food truck can't profit while being parked on asphalt owned by the city. So I jacked the tires off the ground !! Was told immediately again to stop

because there is an ordinance that says you can't profit from people standing on sidewalks owned by the city. So how do you operate a food truck with these ordinances in place ?

Now here is how the city did it. Right before they called me to shut me down they released a post on their website saying LETS BRING FOOD TRUCKS TO ASHLAND.

Did you get that ? They publicly acted like they were supporting food trucks while they were simultaneously shutting me down. They held a few meetings like something would be done. We asked if we could at least operate in the Park, how nice would that be for everyone ? Anyway, it was election time so everyone was positive and supportive. Since those meetings and the election not a word has been mentioned about us operating our food truck.

So, when can we operate the food truck? If there is any event that the city is having in which they are promoting themselves, we are invited. The city recently held an event where they sold tickets to raise money for themselves and promote downtown business. We were very excited to think that city would be pushing people to come to our new restaurant on Central Ave in the Park Place Building. We were told that our restaurant was not considered downtown so we would not be a stop on the event. We were however invited to bring our food truck down and give away free samples. My restaurant is 1/8 of a mile from where my food truck would be parked.

I want to explain the difference between a restaurant giving food away free samples and my food truck doing it. For every restaurant involved customers came in the restaurant and were offered free samples of pre-selected products. So, a good thing for the restaurant, you keep your free sample item available to customers who ask for them, but it really doesn't cost you to be involved in the event. Most likely several of the customers coming in the restaurant will spend money in some way. If they don't, it's not greatly affecting your overhead by being open.

Now, my restaurant is less about 1/8 of a mile from where we were asked to set up our food truck, yet my restaurant is not considered downtown. To set the food truck up requires me to mobilize the unit by making sure propane, diesel and water levels are where they need to be, the unit is self-supportive. I bring in two additional employees to operate the unit and I have the food prepped specifically for the event it is going to. So, let's say it cost me about \$300 just to have the unit there. In addition, I gave away samples of fillet mignon to the tune of \$500 at cost. I spent \$800 that day to give away free food, remember the city sold tickets and profited from the event. I did have a choice to say no, being a new business I had asked them to push people to my restaurant, which they said wasn't downtown. So, I did it, but of course I am still not allowed to operate my food truck on city asphalt or near city sidewalks if it benefits me in anyway.

So, we open the restaurant. The opening was delayed by almost three months as we waited for a gas meter to be installed, yes it actually took them that long.

About 2 months ago we had the Christmas parade in downtown Ashland. To my surprise and that of my staffs, our entire building was shut down to traffic that night. All the floats are staged on three sides of our building and the roads were barricaded in a 5 block radius. No one was allowed in or out. We had two reservations cancel because they could not gain access to our location, one was a party of 30 and one was a party of 10. So, I lost that business for the night as well as any other business, except for the Shriners, thank you guys a lot !!!!!

I sent a text to the contact I have at the city, same guy as above. The text read "who should I thank for shutting my restaurant down tonight? Will I be reimbursed by the City?" a few clarifying texts were traded and I was told this is the way it has been for 10 years. I replied "I haven't been here for decades not even a year. Bad business" I received another text letting me know Fat Patty's had a waiting list, well, there on the parade route aren't they?

The next text threw me for a loop, it read exactly as follows:

"Also, I'm president of the Board of Trustees for the Highlands Museum and Discovery Center, Carol Told me you were interested in catering our Dancing With Our Stars event and also handling our 4th floor conference room." "I supported that in our meeting"

My response:

" I appreciate that, but fail to see the relationship"

DANCING WITH OUR STARS

So now comes in the Highlands Museum and their Dancing with our Stars Event. Our restaurant opened in June last summer. We are about two blocks away from the Highlands Museum. Upon meeting the director, we were told of several exciting opportunities for us in the future, catering to their new ballroom, being funded in part by Economic Development Grants (we'll get to that later). The biggest opportunity we were presented with was catering the Dancing with our Stars event held by the museum. We were convinced by

the director of the highlands museum that if we were to support her throughout the upcoming months we were guaranteed a very good shot at the Dancing with our Stars event. Being a new business we were more than excited about the opportunity. We hosted EVERY event leading up to the main event which is next month. Let me explain, every time there was a meeting with the staff and contestants of the event we provided the room at no cost and food with services at no profit. We did this being told we had a great chance of doing the Dancing with our Stars event.

As we approached the date of the event we had done final taste testing's and been congratulated by members of the board of directors of the Highlands museum. I was visited by a Supervisor of the Alcohol and Beverage Control agency in early December. He had been told to come speak to us regarding the Dancing with our Stars event. An ordinance in place prevented the event or any other event to sell tickets to an occasion that is serving alcohol. In order to do so someone with a caterer's license must be used to serve the alcohol. We immediately applied for our caterers license, as instructed by the KY ABC Board. We were all reassured by Frankfort that the license would be in place at least two weeks before the event.

To properly execute the Dancing with our Stars event we partnered with SYSCO foods. This is the same group that fed over 2,000 people in Portsmouth a few months ago, for SOMC. So we had 4 chefs and a support crew coming for kitchen. SYSCO had agreed to donate 500 fillet mignons for the event. My wife had worked with the areas schools and universities to build a serving staff of over 50 people. We had agreed to buy everything they needed for the event with our profits, that way we would have all the tables, table clothes, napkins, plates and flatware for next year, we are also in the rental business. We were forfeiting our profit to invest in all the equipment that was normally rented from Huntington. The price we gave was less expensive than our competitors and we were to keep all the money in Ashland. The Museum's director said she would rather pay more and deal with someone in Huntington than work with us, we required a \$5,000 deposit on a \$40,000 contract. We were in utter disbelief. It is absolutely normal in the catering business to require a deposit and receive payment in full upon delivery of the food. We were told by the director of the museum that there was no way we would receive a deposit and she would not pay us until 3 days after the event. So rather than cooperate with us on a very normal procedure in the industry she took her business for rentals to Huntington. The Director repeatedly informed us that she intended to make \$100,000 or more this year and she would do whatever it took to do so. Also, to date all tickets have been pre-sold. Meaning the Highlands museum has taken in the money in advance for their event (\$150,000 or more ?), yet disqualified us for asking for a \$5,000 deposit to buy things for their event and took their business out of town.

Let's completely understand this situation. The Highlands Museum in downtown Ashland KY puts on the Dancing with our Stars event each year as a fund-raising event for the Highlands Museum. As stated above in a quote , the President of the Board of Directors of the Highlands Museum is our City's Economic Development Director. If you will recall, he informed me of that in a text concerning my restaurant being closed by the parade.

Due to the KY Alcohol Beverage Control enforcing the law that does not allow an event in Boyd county to serve alcohol without a caterer's liquor license, we became the only caterer that would qualify in this area. Our price was not affected, our price to do this event included supplying the food (6 local employees & up to 6 employees from Sysco, at least on local), to supply a wait staff of 50 (50 local people being paid \$10 an hour to serve and guaranteed 10 hours), and to supply bar services (6 to 10 local people). In this portion of the bid I would be lucky to clear \$3,000 to be put towards my overhead. So, that means we would have employed over 60 people locally to cater an event of over 500 people. My profit was minimal considering the Highlands Museum looks to make over \$100,000.

Rather than have to accept the fact that we were the only caterer in town that would have the appropriate license in time, The Director of the Highlands Museum made the choice to hire a caterer out of Lexington. Thus taking 60 or more jobs from our local economy and send them to Lexington.

Let me sum this up. We dealt with the Highlands Museum for almost 6 months in preparation for the Dancing with Our Stars events. People in the community were lead to believe this event was being done by us. After the event was sold out the Director of the Highlands Museum along with the President of her Board of Directors decided to conduct the second best social event of the year in Ashland with labor and services being sourced from outside our own town. Our very own museum who has Ashland's very own Economic

Development Director as the president of their Board of Directors choose to hire out of town contractors rather than use qualified in town business.

This is not the first time that Ashland's very own business's or professional services have been sourced from out of town by recommendations from the Office of Economic Development. Because the people that have shared this with me are also in business in the community I will not share even the occupation, but guys, if I these people retaliate against me for exposing the truth I sure expect some people to speak out!

In the beginning of this I mentioned that we originally approached the city asking about information for a grant that is offered to help revive old decaying building. I believe they are called Economic Development Block Grants or something similar. After calling the city several times and asking questions I delivered a copy of the appraisal of the Park Place Building to the city. I was then directed to the office of Economic Development. When I brought up the building I was immediately met with some resistance, which at the time I didn't understand. Later when I found out about the Engineering firm that wanted to move to the location, it made sense. Our own office of Economic Development is to blame for running those 100 or more professional jobs out of town. Remember, they were going to move into the Park Place bldg. When I asked about the Grants or any available help to redo the building I was told that to give him a call if we had a dead tree or a broken sidewalk other than that good luck to me.

This is true, I met with the Mayor about it.

Just a few weeks ago I was looking into a property downtown. The owner asked me if I have dealt with economic development office of Ashland, because the Director could get those block development grants. Then it hit me, who recently received one of these grants? The Highlands Museum. Why is it that the Park Place Building is treated as "out of town" but if you're a friend of a friend you can find money to develop downtown through these block grants and economic development? I want to see a map that shows what area is actually available to receive these grants, I'll bet the Park Place Building is within the "downtown" district.

I hope that I have been able to clearly illustrate what is going on in downtown Ashland. Both our City's Economic Development Director and the Director of The Highlands Museum see themselves as above the rest of us. They have chosen to take opportunities for local jobs and for local business's to profit and send it out of town. Their only concern was themselves and the \$100,000 they intend to make.

I had the news people from Huntington in Ashland yesterday to tell them my story. One of the comments I heard was "no wonder Ashland seems like its dyeing". I fully expect to be retaliated against by the city for bringing all this into the light. I am so disheartened over our experience trying to open in a business in Ashland KY. My family has invested their life savings into a community that doesn't support us.

When it came time for me to settle down and raise a family I chose Ashland KY. I was born and raised in Kentucky, my oldest son is graduating from Russell this year and my youngest son will start school next year. I am a normal guy. I have worked my entire life as a carpenter and underwater welder. I am not one of the privileged that has had everything handed to me. The \$250,000 that we have invested in downtown Ashland is almost everything I had. I believed in my city, my state and my country, unfortunately our local government is depictive of the situation in Washington DC. We have entitled people who have their position in the city because their daddy was somebody or their husband was somebody. These people I have spoken of need to be replaced.

LETS MAKE ASHLAND GREAT AGAIN

My employees came up with a new slogan

BOYCOTT

DANCING WITH OUR STARS

WHO SENT OUR JOBS OUT OF TOWN

We will be printing thousands of flyers with our new slogan and placing them all over town. If you are interested in displaying a flyer in your place of business, please let us know.

Here is what I would ask personally. I own The Ambassador Restaurant in what most people would consider downtown Ashland. We have great food in a casual atmosphere. There is no dress code, it looks so pretty inside because we do weddings from time to time. Other than that we cook steaks and have all you can eat crab legs on the weekends. We have live music every Thursday, Friday and Saturday by LOCAL musicians. Before I am forced to close my doors by operating in a city that will not support me I would ask this: For those of you who have never tried the restaurant please give it a try. We have steaks, chicken and pork chops on an early bird menu for \$10, it's a good price for a great meal. We have soups, pizzas, salads, burgers and lots of great appetizers as well.

I expect full retaliation from the city of Ashland for exposing these things, but honestly how much more can they do to hurt me ?

My name is Robert Batchelor, I am a working class citizen who is over taxed and not supported by the city I have invested in. If you are thinking of moving your business to Ashland KY you better think twice, that is unless you are one of the entitled ones !