



Sketching Economic Development

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INTRO: Can Michigan fix its problems by drawing pictures of them? That's what an artist did last week at the Detroit Regional Chamber's Mackinac Policy Conference. She drew bikes, buses, buildings and wrote words like 'entrepreneurship: failure is ok.' The Chamber hired her to draw on paper what every speaker said on stage. Michigan Now's Chris McCarus talked to the artist, Julie Stuart, on the last day of the conference. Her website is www.MakingIdeasVisible.com.



Chicago native Julie Stuart currently lives in Atlanta. She says she's excited to see what Detroit is doing to reinvent itself. She says the whole country is rooting for it.

"I grew up in Chicago," Stuart said. "I was thrilled to come up to Mackinac Island. I've been here before."

McCarus asked, "What are we looking at? How big is this paper that you've written on? What would you call it?"

"Regular poster board paper," Stuart said. "4 by 8 feet. I use a different variety of markers."

"So if you could walk us through the 10 by 4 foot....what are the boards made of?"

"This is just foam core? I put my paper on top of the foam core with tape. I have a bunch of different kind of markers. I just listen to where the conversation is going to go. I have a background as a journalist. I think in terms of the whole story, the key quotes, the key takeaways, how it weaves together. I try to pull visual imagery out of it as it goes. I've gotten pretty good at drawing the state of Michigan."

As Stuart and McCarus spoke, [Detroit Chamber CEO Sandy Baruah](#) described Stuart's work. Baruah was interviewed on television.

"If people are not going to take notes," Baruah said, "how can we get something that we can shrink down on an 8.5 x 11 piece of paper and say hey here's a depiction of what we talked about? We actually have people offering money (to buy the artwork)."

Detroit Public TV anchor Christy McDonald said: "I would love to have a booklet, creating a booklet showing this is our time here that illustrates all the sessions. (It would be nice) If you were able to take it away. It really is striking how things can be even when you're just talking about it."

On the set with McDonald was another woman who'd attended all 3 days of the conference inside the Grand Hotel on Mackinac. "It was fun to see people walking by them to actually see what was striking them: the words, the phrases, the ideas. I thought it was a brilliant idea Sandy. Thank you for bringing it forward."

Baruah didn't take credit for bringing the graphic artist. "The team brought it together," he said.

The artist herself described how the praise made her feel.

"Oh it's great. It's not surprising because it happens all the time. People who haven't seen this process before are not sure what to expect. 15 minutes into it they say that's so cool. Then when they see one of the finished pieces they are blown away."

"Take us through this particular painting or sketch," McCarus said. "What do you call it?"

"They call it a storyboard. There's not a great term in my industry everyone calls it something different."



“We’re talking to Julie Stuart of Making Ideas Visible. That’s the name of her company.”

“We’re looking at this one. Let’s go through this particular map.”

“This one is about corporate investment in communities,” Stuart explained. “It was a panel discussion. We had someone who was the chair of DTE Energy, Henry Ford Health Systems and someone from Huntington Bank. They were all talking about the way they have gotten involved in their communities and what that’s led to. Each speaker go their own different area and then there were areas where they started to overlap: building communities and key themes that came out about engaging communities and having everybody count. There was a particular conversation about attracting millennials.”

“Who or what are millennials?” McCarus asked.

“They are a younger demographic, people wired all the time,” Stuart said. “They check their Facebook updates before they wake up out of bed. The interesting point made about millennials is they decide where they want to live before they decide the kind of job they want to take.”

“Do you think this republican dominated chamber of commerce audience believes that’s true?” McCarus asked.

“Well they better start believing it’s true,” Stuart said. “The gentleman from Grand Rapids made that point because he realized they were leaking talent. So they wanted to do things to keep that talent, interesting people in Grand Rapids. So they had ArtPrize, Zombie Walks. They are doing pro-active things to let these people design the community.”

McCarus said, “A couple other highlights here. We see a church with a cross at the top.”

“That was again around the discussion of Grand Rapids because traditionally more people were married than not. For the millennials they want opportunities to

meet people. So the way they used to market Grand Rapids wasn't working to attract these younger workers. So that's where the church came in."

McCarus read from the poster board several ideas, "Building communities... confident not arrogant...everyone counts.... How big of a team do we want to play on?"

"That's where they started talking about how Grand Rapids and Detroit are entwined and how we need to team cross state/cross region to really be on the ground floor of a rebirth."

"You're from Chicago. You know what rust-belt cities are like. You now live in Atlanta. What do you think of us?" McCarus asked Stuart.

"I've been following the Detroit story for a couple of years. I'm really rooting for you guys. I'm really, really enthusiastic. When they first contacted me to do this conference two years ago I was really bummed I couldn't be here because it was when the story of the rebirth and the rejuvenation was just starting to happen, nationally. And I used to work in politics before I did this. I have my ear to the ground in that way.

"I'm starting to get worried about Atlanta. There are a bunch of cities doing a lot of good things and I feel that Atlanta is getting lapped. We may be in Michigan's situation where you guys were several years ago we may be there soon and then try to figure out how to reinvent ourselves. I think it's a great story. There are so many people paying attention to it right now."

"Why do you think Detroit would be able to pass up Atlanta?" McCarus asked.

"I think there is a vibrancy to the culture," Stuart said. "I have an art background. There is so opportunity, so much free form stuff going on in Detroit and it seems like anything's possible. There's a big canvass to write on. There's a lot of hometown enthusiasm to support these people who are changing the culture and getting out there and doing exciting things and bringing attention to the city."

"You're a journalist and an artist and a political operative. You know the question why do you do this? I have to ask you why do you do this activity?"

“That’s a good question. It’s what I’m currently doing right now. I love the work because it puts me in really interesting situations where I get to be around people

with really big ideas like [Tom Friedman](#) and [Fareed Zakaria](#). I got to have a drink with [Donna Brazile](#) last night. I love being around people as they’re grappling with big ideas and helping them see what they are trying to say and giving them a road map. On one of these there was an action item that came out on the second day. We need to have a contest with all the designers about helping Detroit do some visions of what a positive scenario looks like and I’d love to help.”

“I think you are. Julie Stuart from the Making Ideas Visible Company and all these drawings you’ve got you’ve put copyright 2012 because they are that cool that somebody might try to copy them and make money off of them.”

“I’ve got a big fat contract that protects my intellectual property. And we’re going to figure out a plan to roll these out to everyone afterwards.”

Continue to last page of article for samples of Julie’s work.

