

Select Greater Philadelphia puts its money where its name is

Philadelphia, city of neighborhoods, city of MOVE. City of Franklin, city of Abscam. City of Ormandy, city of Scarfo. City of colleges, city of boos. City of Boathouse Row, city of the Badlands. City of Sister Mary, city of pay-to-play.

Philadelphia, city of mixed messages.

Into this land of bittersweet comes a new business group with an upbeat message: Philadelphia, region of promise. Philadelphia, cradle of profits.

Select Greater Philadelphia, two years old and eager for action, knows cynics may snicker at its message. It doesn't care. It has had it with the self-defeating acceptance of decline.

This business promotion agency a \$16 million fundraising campaign now complete, is ready to do something this region, amazingly has never done in more than a token way market philly nationally and globally as a place to do business.

The group is imbued with

confidence of businesspeople who think they've got something good to sell.

Image isn't everything, but it matters. For too long, the Philadelphia region has allowed competitors to define it by its negatives. While other regions pooled sources and trumpeted assets, it pouted and squabbled.

So, corporate location consultants often ignored the considerable pluses of a region which, properly defined, stretches from Trenton to Wilmington: location, work force, research riches, culture, cost of living.

Select Greater Philadelphia aims to tell that hopeful story locally and globally. It is going to identify and romance companies that might want to join this region's vibrant economic dusters, then turn the closing of deals over to existing government agencies.

Here's one thing Select Greater Philadelphia already has done: It has gotten economic development officials in the 11-county region to meet together and agree to

cooperate more.

"It's an elemental step," said Mark Schweiker, Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce CEO, and the man who has spearheaded the effort "Places like Phoenix/Scottsdale have been doing this stuff for 10 years or more."

Thomas Morr is leaving a good gig in the Washington area to lead Select Greater Philadelphia. He concedes many people ask him why he's coming here, to Negadelphia.

"What got my interest was the commitment and passion from the business leaders to build a better community," he said. He didn't name names,

but he's talking about people such as Hugh Long of Wachovia Bank and Stephen Steinour of Citizens Bank, also relative newcomers to the area.

"This is really an underappreciated community" Morr said. "It has a broader, more comprehensive economy than D.C., where a third of what goes on is tied to government."

Businesspeople don't invest on the basis of a neat slogan or civic rah-rah. You have to have the goods. This region is much more than high taxes, pay-to-play, sprawl and parochialism. It has the goods.



ONLINE EXTRA

A mind for all seasons

Chris Satullo is more than chief of the Inquirer's Editorial Board - he's a storyteller and an unpredictable centrist. To get his take on what's puzzling you, go to: <http://go.philly.com/chrissatullo>

granting and hospital beds; we're top three in both categories.

"Why'd I put Cephalon here? In building a young company your first customer is the big pharma companies. They're here. It's easier to build relationships when you have dinner together, go to the same meetings.... There's high-quality talent you can recruit

'Then, location. In my business, you need access to two things: capital and regulators. One is centered New York, the other in Washington, both a short Metroliner ride away. If you're on the West Coast, you have burn a day just traveling to those meetings. ...

"If you look at the top people in life sciences, 50 are from here. The talent is here we just need to create the opportunity for them to stay here."

Maybe selecting greater Philadelphia isn't such a wacky idea, after all.

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'Take it from one entrepreneur who's built a billion-dollar, cutting-edge business here. A while ago, I got a chance to ask Frank Baldino of Cephalon Inc. why he rooted his hot biotech company in Chester County.

His answer blew the last cobwebs of cynicism out of my brain:

"If your business is linked to life sciences, nothing compares to the assets here. More medical schools than any city in the world. More pharma companies within 100 miles. Several of the nation's most successful biotech companies. Then layer on top of that federal research