BUILDING CIVIC LEADERSHIP IN PORTLAND, MAINE

By Thomas J. Rice, Ph.D.

Visiting Maine in 1995, Charles Kuralt, beloved star of *On The Road* fame, gave voice to a common sentiment: "If I were going to choose an American city to live in, Portland would be on my list" (Kuralt,1995, p. 168). High praise from a veteran chronicler of America's most attractive habitats.

Kuralt's impression is echoed by a chorus of other enthusiasts who shortened their list to one and acted on it. They find this Old Port city of about 26,000 a marvel of livability, blending the best of small town civility with refined urban amenities. Driven by the economic prosperity of the 90s and the freedom of telecommuting, it has attracted a diverse array of newcomers: immigrants, artists, new economy inventors, old economy investors, restaurateurs and a host of civic entrepreneurs that make the region a model of creativity, energy and possibility other cities can only dream about.

It was not always so.

Portland's story is one that strongly supports the hypothesis, "no pain, no gain." Visiting Portland in the late 1970's was to witness a case study in stagnation. Along with several other Northeastern cities, it was being written off by urban "lifecycle" theorists as a city that had outlived its usefulness: it was seen as beyond hope by the pundits, best left to fade away. They cited ample evidence: Unemployment was severe and rising. Beautiful old buildings were abandoned, shop-fronts boarded up, locals were leaving for more promising environs. It seemed that all of America was moving to the Sunbelt. Despair was closing in. Then the 1980s boom hit.

Portland rode the rising tide like a jockey with lucky post position at the Kentucky Derby. With pent up capacity - human and material - and a hunger for local opportunities, the city rebounded to heights "that exceeded the expectations and experience of most Maine people" (Hird, 1993). Job opportunities became competitive with the best national profiles, as did wages

and benefit packages. Housing prices escalated, driven by the manic speculation in the Boston region and almost all points south. Bankers, real estate developers investors and political leaders basked in the glory of success.

As John Kenneth Galbraith said of the roaring '20s hubris, "every fool became a financier.' In Portland's roaring '80s, an aura of invincibility prevailed, no questions asked. Until, as with all business cycles, it ended; boom turned to bust.

Suddenly, things looked bleak, again. As the downward spiral gained a vicious momentum, business after business called it quits. Banks closed their doors. Homes, leveraged with "jumbo" mortgages, were repossessed. Unemployment soared. And, of course, rainy-day government services suffered cutbacks.

Predictably, the spotlight turned to the informal power structure - the good ole' boys of the Cumberland Club oligarchy - who had been in charge up to now. But it was no longer there, having dissolved in the rough and tumble of bankruptcies, mergers, acquisitions, and absentee ownership. In light of the leadership vacuum, that is when the angry questions started: How could this happen? Who's to blame? Why didn't "the leadership" see this coming? What kind of leadership was this anyway? And, finally, what can we do about this mess?

LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE

To Jim Orr, the new CEO of UNUM Insurance, the leadership void was obvious, especially in the civic arena. He had no interest in playing the blame game, but he also knew the solution had to go beyond the Chamber of Commerce. "I just knew that the usual handful of CEOs who came together for lunch at the Cumberland Club were not going to be the answer. The world had changed too much; it was time to involve the fabric of the community in defining and solving the problems that we all shared."

As a former Executive Vice President of Connecticut Bank and Trust in Hartford,

Connecticut, the insurance capital of America, Orr had moved to Portland in the late ' 80s to assume the top job at UNUM. He had some experience with a new way of thinking about complex problem-solving. As a participant in the American Leadership Forum (ALF), Orr had grasped the potential of new attitudes, skills, and behaviors to make real change in the way leadership is practiced. Urged by Janice Cohen Hird, UNUM's talented Director of Corporate Public Involvement, Orr saw Portland's predicament as an opportunity to model a new kind of leadership. This meant resisting the traditional temptation to *carpe diem*, define the issues and drive the solutions that seemed obvious and in UNUM's best interest.

Hird had become a passionate advocate of a new collaborative approach. Having just spent two-years working with the Education Coalition for Maine, an initiative sponsored by both the legislature and the governor's office, she was acutely aware of two things: the fatal flaws of hierarchical leadership and the formidable barriers to bringing about real, systemic change in a leadership culture.

She recalls the reasoning that informed her insistence on broad-based community participation: "Our belief in the importance of participation in change efforts was reinforced by our experience within UNUM as it struggled to restructure itself for worldwide leadership in the disability insurance industry. The redistribution of power, control and responsibility requires broad base involvement from the beginning of the change effort. Assuming the leadership struggle in the community had some of the same characteristics of corporate leadership, we neither could nor should move forward without community support" (Hird, 1993, p. 3).

Ten years later, Cohen stands firm on these bedrock premises. Any new civic leadership initiative could not be driven solely by UNUM (or any other single entity). The entire change process needed to be "owned in the hearts and souls" of Greater Portland. Given these premises, the assumption that leadership was the issue in the community needed to be tested as objectively as possible to develop the necessary support. The stage was now set for beginning the process.

INITIATING THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Consistent with a disciplined effort not to just assume the problem existed, Hird began by asking a series of questions:

- Is leadership a concern to the Greater Portland community?

- Is there a leadership vacuum?

- Is leadership a key ingredient in why public issues are or are not being resolved successfully?

- What are the leadership issues of the region?

- What is the need to help promote effective solutions to public issues?

- If it is important, how would we promote an ethic of civic involvement?

Armed with this protocol, Hird and UNUM hired The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI), a Boston-based non-profit research group, to conduct interviews with a target population of "key leaders" in Greater Portland. They were looking for "Leaders who had significant experience wrestling with public issues as elected officials, community representatives or corporate leaders and had demonstrated a high level of civic involvement" (TPI Memorandum, 1992).

The first round of interviewees were selected for their immediate potential to furnish insight on the issue. From there, the sample "snowballed" as each person provided new names until they tapped 25 leaders covering the three sectors.

Not surprisingly, their findings provided strong affirmative evidence for concern with leadership at all levels. Specifically, they found:

- lack of political leadership at the state level;

- lack of dialogue between special interest groups and less narrow constituencies;

- lack of common ground where solutions to issues can be hammered out;

- no ethic of public service and civic leadership is being effectively encouraged in the private sector or only on sporadic cases.

• little or no sense of ownership of government and public issues within the private sector.

In addition to these five substantive findings, the researchers heard a number of observations that helped flesh out the problem:

• There is an interregnum in corporate civic leadership as CEOs focus on the requirements of thriving in a newly competitive world. *Because of the press of business matters, most CEOs are simply not as available as their predecessors were for the large-scale civic endeavors;*

• Business and government appeared to speak different languages;

• The private sector is experiencing a gap between the internal leadership and skills of current management and the capacities necessary for success in today's complicated and changing environments;

• Fear of the complexity of public issues inhibits participation;

• Old models of corporate leadership in public life seem dead and gone with deregulation, bankruptcies, and absentee ownership;

• Lack of opportunity to practice and expand upon the skills needed to function effectively in civic life for those who want to serve;

• A need for the creation of a network of civic peers: currently there is no glue that holds the hard work of civic activists together.

In addition to local interviews, TPI investigated leadership initiatives outside the region that might further illuminate the issue. Academics, foundations, and trade associations involved with leadership programs were surveyed. The survey covered four points: an understanding of the motivation behind their support for or initiation of leadership training; their understanding of the value of formal leadership programs; useful models for civic leadership development; and key components of successful examples.

Interestingly, their investigation uncovered a common pattern of motivations for a wide range of initiatives around the country:

• a sense that there was a leadership vacuum in public and civic life;

• a feeling that people in the private sector were not being groomed for civic leadership;

• a lack of a unifying awareness of the primary problems of the state or region, especially economic challenges;

• insufficient training for those business and community leaders who are involved in public service.

These common concerns gave impetus to a number of formal leadership programs around the country. They shared several common design elements and characteristics:

• private sponsorship;

• annual classes of participants, usually 25-50 men and women competitively chosen;

• a time commitment of 6-12 months for participants;

• a common purpose of identifying and preparing of a new generation of civic leaders;

• a focus on analyzing and responding to central issues facing the region;

• opportunities for those who currently serve to practice and expand upon skills to function in civic life;

• a common goal of creating a network of civic peers across sectors.

Given these research findings, both at the regional level in Greater Portland and nationally, TPI went on to outline its vision for what a "Leadership Institute" should deliver when "fully realized." A civic leadership institute should:

• promote and nurture an ethic of civic involvement of key people in business;

• inform and support the ongoing efforts of those who are seeking to lead on major public issues;

• enhance the problem-solving skills of public and private sector leaders;

• provide common ground that promotes collaboration between public and private sectors.

The structure of the program should involve:

• the creation of a civic leadership curriculum that provides participants with

sophisticated support in building skills relevant to addressing civic issues(for example, facilitation, mediation), high level briefings on the analysis of key problems that challenge the area's well-being, and actual collaborative problem-solving experience;

• recruitment of an annual class of relatively senior representatives from the business, community and government sectors;

• ongoing support for the civic activities and aspirations of the institute's graduates;

• development of an academically connected database and research component that supports the training and public policy activities of the institute.

FOUNDATIONS OF PROGRAM DESIGN

Now came a critical juncture for UNUM's Orr and Hird, a "strategic moment." Mindful of the need to transfer ownership with all deliberate speed, the next step was to invite a core group of stakeholders/interviewees "who had demonstrated a passion for effective leadership and a thoughtful approach to potential solutions" to form an advisory group to collaborate in designing a response to TPI's research findings.

Hird consulted leadership experts of local, regional, and national stature. Her central concern was to find a model of leadership development capable of creating real and lasting change. She articulated the concern in her visionary way: ìWe needed to know what was already being tried to develop the leaders for this more complex and diverse society, what leadership development programs actually resulted in improving community life, and what would we need to do if we were to go beyond training leaders to actually changing the leadership culture. What still seemed missing was the integration of the new leadership model into the community by reconnecting the leaders to the general citizenry and an infrastructure to support practicing leaders (Hird, 1993, p. 3).

Jim Orr echoed this concern. He did not want to create just another leadership program that might benefit the participants or their organizations, but leave the community untouched. "We needed to provide some glue, something intense, *like being trapped in an elevator* together and coming up with the solution as a group. It had to be that visceral. It had to go beyond an intellectual exercise."

With this image in mind, Orr committed the resources of the UNUM Foundation to push the process forward. Janice Cohen Hird was his go-to delegate. She was granted "executive loan" status to lead the project. She had a budget of $75,000 and she knew Portland and had earned respect as a steward of its future. While these were the tangible ingredients of the success story, there is uniform agreement that the essential factor was the passionate commitment of Hird as an advocate. She had the courage to push into unknown territory. The challenge was daunting: "Could they (the advisory group) recommend to fellow leaders a program that challenged values, behaviors, and even the knowledge base that had created their own success?" It was now the spring of 1993, almost a year after the inquiry on leadership was launched, and the jury was still out on this question.

WORKING TOGETHER: THE FIRST TEST OF COLLABORATIVE ACUMEN

Hird and the advisory group now took up the challenge. Recognizing they had no time for missteps, they retained Interaction Associates, a nationally recognized consulting and training firm noted for their expertise in collaborative leadership. David Straus, the firm's founder, was the lead consultant. He brought a wealth of experience in designing and facilitating public-private partnerships, including successful initiatives in Denver, Colorado and Newark, New Jersey. From the start, Straus operated from the premise that "If this is to be a collaborative leadership program, the planning process needs to model collaboration. The change you want is the change you start with."

Straus began with an education phase on some basic principles of collaboration. He formed a small "process design team," a subset of the advisory group, including Hird, to plan a series of meetings with clear desired outcomes and supporting agendas. They laid out a "process map" with clear milestones and agreements to be built along the way. The focus was on setting up for success, so that the design would be clear and based on a solid foundation of agreements by consensus.

The learning curve was steep. New habits had to be internalized; working for group consensus - "we all agree to support the implementation of this decision" - was hard for impatient leaders accustomed to "decide and announce" leadership styles. "Isn't this program supposed to be for other people?" was an attitudinal barrier to be overcome. So, too, was the idea of including "difficult personalities." Skeptics had to be convinced that this new way - outside their experience and comfort zone - would be worth the effort in the end.

After all the TPI research, and all the conversations, it was still imperative not to take the problem for granted. Straus reminded the advisory group of the bottom line: "If this process is to succeed, a broad-base of representative stakeholders beyond UNUM and a hardy band of supporters will need to agree that, yes, there is a leadership problem."

It was relatively easy to get agreement on some tried-and-true design elements; the ones that had proved themselves elsewhere. The harder question was: What would be the breakthrough here? How will we create a self-renewing civic leadership culture that will not peter out as soon as the "external infrastructure that created it is removed?"

GETTING TO YES ON DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS

The outcomes of the education and "planning to plan" meetings are instructive. David Straus recalls several core principles evolving through many iterations of what he calls "the heuristic or accordion planning cycle as opposed to traditional linear planning." These design

principles proved robust as a container for the program over time:

- the advisory group dynamic should be subject to the discipline of a collaborative process and seen as a microcosm - the seed crystal - of a whole systems change effort for the region;
- an integrated leadership training program should be seen as part of a regional cultural change process;
- the credibility of initial group of participants is critical, so the focus needs to be on senior leadership;
- the process must have broad-based community support and ownership across all three sectors;
- resource benefactors are critical up front, but then the responsibility must be broadly shared to avoid dependency or the appearance of disproportionate influence;
- a common theory of collaboration and congruent practices must permeate the program from start to finish without exceptions;
- community-based projects are needed to model the design of successful collaborative efforts and serve as a way to practice new skills and behaviors.

After the first round of education sessions and preliminary alignment on the nature and scope of the program - its design specifications - it was decided to bolster "the content expertise" of the group as it built the leadership curriculum. They turned to David Chrislip, of the National Civic League, who had achieved an outstanding reputation for his work with the highly popular American Leadership Forum. Jim Orr had already experienced ALF first hand. Chrislip, a scholarly practitioner, had also been a senior consultant with Interaction Associates in the mid 1980s, had collaborated with Straus on several projects and brought a calm brilliance to his craft.

The Advisory group now had the perfect mix of resources: credible, generous sponsorship, world class content and process expertise, and a genuine crisis - lack of respected civic leadership - to propel the initiative. The product was worthy of all the hard work: a rigorous, 15-day program, based on the best existing practices with the unique quality of being

collaboratively designed and integrated. Over time, if the theory was correct, it would add up to a large-scale cultural change in the civic leadership capacity of Greater Portland.

By early May, Chrislip had a draft of the offering ready for the advisory group. Working closely with Straus, who brought Interaction's flagship *Facilitative Leadership* practices and *Change Management* models and tools to the mix, the two had fashioned a uniquely rich offering.

One can only imagine the excitement of the group as they feasted their eyes on the overall purpose statement**:** "Create a network of leaders who can act on behalf of the shared concerns of the Portland region." Yes. It was real: Outcomes, agenda, roles . . . just as they had envisioned, complete with a "Transforming Experience" - 4 days together at Outward Bound**.** They devoured the program outline, seeing for the first time how the l5-day program would unfold:

INSERT 15-DAY PROGRAM OUTLINE HERE

The advisory group was delighted with the product. It passed muster immediately, having exceeded their expectations. It was clearly distinguished in sophistication, creativity, and relevance to the challenges at hand. They had their program and more.

Still, a problem remained. The process and program was still strongly associated with UNUM. Everyone acknowledged that Hird was the driving force that kept the project on track. The UNUM Foundation, of which she was Director, provided all the initial funding to pay for consulting and research. It was time to transfer ownership to a broader citizenry.

The core design group realized that their adoption of the program design would not be enough to assure broader buy-in. UNUM, gracious benefactors to the end, hosted a luncheon presentation for all the leaders who had been interviewed and many who had not. It was a carefully orchestrated event. The advisory group - keyed up with performance anxiety - made the presentation as a team and led the ensuing discussion. Chrislip and Straus stayed in the background as coaches and consultants, aware that expertise is no substitute for empathy and stewardship of place. The enthusiasm was palpable, but the question remained: would this fade, as with so many other exciting ideas, with the next day's pressing agenda?

They did not have to wait long for an answer. In follow-up phone calls, Hird contacted each attendee and those invited but unable to attend. What do you think? Should we go ahead to implementation? Will you be willing to serve on the first Board of Directors? Will you give us financial support to launch the program, including an $8,000 tuition grant for the first year participation? The answers: Great program. Yes! Yes! Yes! We're in.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION

So far so good. Ownership had been transferred, but it was now nitty gritty time. The advisory group had to now go into operational mode: they formed a Board of Directors and all but one agreed to serve. They expanded the group to include missing stakeholders from other sectors. Pressing questions loomed: What kind of organizational structure would be best for coordinating and administering the program? Who would be the executive director to see this ship safely out of harbor? Who would deliver the training? How could balanced participation be guaranteed? Would senior leaders commit to 15 days in the program? A sound design and curriculum is still a theory until it is tested in action.

It was June of 1993 by now and time was marching on. If they were going to launch in fall, they would have to move fast. Finally, after almost two years of preliminary work, the

newly expanded,three sector representative Board of Directors decided to create the *Institute for Civic Leadership* (ICL) of Greater Portland.

The Alpha Class was slated to start in September of 1993. More than half of the board was able to free up their schedules to participate in the Class of '94î (It became an ironic testimony to the effectiveness of the training that later Board meetings soon turned into an Us vs. Them dynamic - those who had taken the training versus those who had not). Twenty-nine leaders from business, government, and community-based non-profits made the commitment. Tuition was set up on a sliding scale based on organization size and sector. The overall tuition revenue is set to cover program costs, including faculty, administration, venue, and outreach. In yet one more act of generosity, the UNUM Foundation underwrote the first year's administrative expense and continued Janice Hird's "executive loan" status so that she could continue to serve the mission of ICL.

Hird served as first Program Director. A popular and logical choice, she also participated in the Alpha Class. Chrislip, in collaboration with Straus of Interaction Associates, was invited to deliver the training. Having established close relationships with the Board and earned their confidence, this, too, seemed a natural choice.

In the fall of '93, after a long labor of love, Hird took the long view as she submitted her summary report to the Board of Directors: "A new culture of collaborative leadership will not be created in greater Portland simply by training 25-30 new leaders each year. Their commitment to civic life cannot be a ten month training program that ends with the completion of a community project. Those leaders need to become practicing collaborative leaders in the community and in their organizations. They need to facilitate the involvement of the whole community in creating a collaborative culture and they need to integrate their own organization whether private, public, or non-profit into the whole fabric of the community" (Hird, 1993, p. 5).

The torch had been passed. It was now up to a new, broader base of community leaders to take stewardship of the region's destiny. Only time would tell if they would rise to the occasion.

RETROSPECTIVE

Since that first September launch in 1993, over 200 leaders have graduated from the ICL. The founders (Orr, Hird and the original advisory group of thirteen, as well as Chrislip and Straus), have detailed memories of the struggle and the rewards of launching what everyone agrees is a highly successful program. Since then, much has changed in the program, including its Board, executive director, and faculty over the eight years. The Board has turned over several times and continues to be strongly involved and creative in their input to the program. The ICL now has its fourth Executive Director, Ellen Grant, whose discipline and passion for excellence provides the glue that holds it all together. She was a member of the Delta Class, 1996. Colleen Myers and Susan Clarke played the role after Hird left, leaving their indelibly positive marks.

As for the faculty, Straus and Chrislip delivered the first year as a team, then brought on the charismatic Marianne Hughes, Executive Director of the Interaction Institute for Social Change, Interaction Associates not-for-profit organization. In the fall of 1996, this author joined the team of Chrislip and Hughes, when Straus went on sabbatical. Chrislip stayed on the team until ''98, when he left for other pursuits; Hughes and Rice have served as faculty since, with the occasional cameo appearance by other specialists.

The transition in the Institute's faculty has brought a significant shift in style and substance. We update the core curriculum each year, in response to feedback from alumni and the emerging research findings and ideas in the field. For example, we now have more experiential learning modules. With strong Board support, we place a greater emphasis on diversity and multicultural competence. We use poetry, dialogue, music and story-telling - consistent with the Celtic identities of the faculty; we balance the affective with the cognitive, honoring the power of personal disclosure to cement lasting friendships. We have become more pragmatic in our expectations of community projects that are less elaborate and more achievable in the 15-day timeframe.

Yet, for all of these changes, the underlying design principles installed by the founders remain firm: collaborative values with a focus on the creation of civic capacity.

TAKING STOCK: ASSESSING THE IMPACT

Given all the energy and resources that went into its creation and the flood of commitment it has taken to sustain the ICL, it seems fair to ask about impact. Did it realize the original vision? Is the civic "leadership vacuum" solved in Greater Portland? Is there tangible evidence that the investment was worth the return?

We have three sources of data to answer these questions. One comes from an assessment commissioned by ICL's third Executive Director, Susan Clark, in 1999. The second is from interviews conducted with a sample of alumni for this chapter. A third is from anecdotal accounts of participants their colleagues over the past eight years. Each time the alumni come together - and that is quite frequently - someone has a new story to relate about the impact of the Institute's program.

Some of the more visible and widely appreciated results include:

Cruise Ships Coming to Portland Harbor

When she participated in the Institute's Alpha Class, Roxanne Cole of Ram Harnden Realty was already heavily committed to civic leadership as the Chair of the Board of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Portland. Reluctant to undertake more civic responsibilities at that time, Roxanne was nevertheless haunted by an image of 'ships of money' by-passing Portland for Bar Harbor and other New England destinations. With the help of Portland's Director of Waterfront and Transportation, Tom Valleau, Roxanne agreed to chair a Chamber committee to look at the opportunity. "With all my other Chamber duties I never would have

agreed to take this on," Roxanne recounts, "except for the insights gained at the Institute training. Frankly, because of the Institute training I could see that I would be able to form the initiative, including future leaders in the original meetings, and that they would own the vision and ultimately bring the project to fruition. That is exactly what happened, and today, with the help of leaders like David Swardlick, Portland is attracting higher quality cruise ships and is implementing a strategy to increase the number of both military and cruise ships coming to Casco Bay."

Perhaps the most tangible aspects of the success of the initiative are the recent visits of Holland America's prestigious cruise ships and the l996 visit of the crown jewel of the cruise ship industry - the Queen Elizabeth II.

Maine Environmental Priorities Project

Throughout the development boom of the 1980s, environmentalists, developers, and state regulators battled over the proper mix of development and preservation - what is now called 'smart growth' - of Maine's natural resources. Tired of the combative approach, key representatives of each group came together in the early 1990s to find a better way. By early 1996 the Maine Environmental Priorities Project had identified and ranked the state's most urgent environmental issues. More importantly, because of the collaborative process that involved most of the key environmental stakeholders in the state, implementation of the Project's recommendations proved relatively smooth.

Al Curran of Woodward and Curran, an environmental consulting firm, was a member of ICL class of 1994. Working collaboratively with Evan Richert, Director of the State Planning Office and former President of the Institute's Board of Directors, he provided key leadership to the Maine Environmental Priorities Project, applying the collaborative principles all the graduates of ICL learn - stakeholder inclusion from the start, working for consensus, balancing results with a good, facilitated process and a relationship focus, and celebrating little successes

along the way.

Downtown Portland District (PDD) Conflict Prevention

As the economic and cultural hub of the Greater Portland Region, the health of Portland's Downtown District (PDD) is of vital concern to all. In 1994, the concern was about proliferation of bars in the Old Port; this was but the latest flareup of a social and cultural issue that had surfaced many times before. This time it would be different, because PDD knew just what to do. Jim Harnden, (Beta Class) met with PDD Executive Director, Barbara Hager (Gamma Class) and several other ICL graduates for a strategy session. What ICL principles might apply to this situation? Answer: Developed a list of key stakeholders in the Old Port and convene them to explore all sides of the issue in a well-facilitated, safe setting.

National Semiconductor Expansion in South Portland

In the fall of 1995, Greater Portland was buzzing about the decision of the National Semiconductor company to expand its operations in South Portland. The project created hundreds of new, high-paying jobs in construction and manufacturing, as well as 'spin-off' jobs exceeding the number of new company positions as additional goods and services were required by the firm. How was Greater Portland able to land this prize? According to Laurenz Schmidt, lead of National Semiconductor's operations in South Portland and a member of the ICL's class of 1995, Maine won over the company's site selection committee with a formidable display of "civic will."

Relying on collaborative principles, a large group representing the multiple stakeholders - what else? – in the project was convened to pursue this regional development opportunity. There was no evidence of a "leadership vacuum" in that initiative. Potential conflicts were worked out in advance of the site selection committee's visit. National Semiconductor was offered an array

of incentives, including the creation of a Tax Increment Financing District, which put Maine ahead of even Sunbelt competitors who had been lavishly successful in 1980s exodus from the Northeast. Speaking to the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Schmidt cited the Institute for Civic Leadership as one of the key resources which allowed Greater Portland to muster the civic will necessary to achieve sustainable economic development in a globally competitive environment.

If, as Tip O'Neill was fond of saying, "all politics is local" it seems clear that all economic development is regional, to the degree that it can exercise it's civic - that is, collaborative - will.

Educational Reform Initiatives

"The ICL gave us a way beyond adversarial politics to support the school redesign efforts which citizens, policymakers, business, and educational leaders all wanted yet couldn't initiate with any success on their own." This was how Tim McCormack, superintendent of the Sanford School system and another ICL graduate put it. He and other alumni cited several successes in the educational arena: expansion of school and community partnership programs, concerted and interdependent efforts to enact state legislation for comprehensive Learning Results, as well as some reduction in the usually conflicted budget deliberations between town councils and school boards. All of this, thanks to ICL's network and new way of approaching complex and potentially thorny issues. ICL alumni with strong interests in educational reform, now are advocating that ICL's leadership philosophy and methodologies become the basis for training and revised standards for state certification of principals and superintendents.

Boy's Conference: Getting at the Roots of Domestic Violence

It began with a "strategic moment," to hear Layne Gregory, Epsilon Class and former co-chair of the ICL Board, tell the story. As Program Manager of Family Violence Prevention

Programs for the City of Portland, Layne had convened a group of about 12 men to get input on the question of "What do boys need?" This was a new question, since much of the focus had been on the needs of girls and women, the most obvious victims of family violence. The answers turned critical. Were boys not victims too? Could it be that male violence was not the issue? Perhaps some assumptions needed to be reexamined. This veered toward opening up all the explosive issues of gender, power and responsibility for the problem of family violence.

The strategic moment came when Layne found herself struggling not to take the challenges personally. Was she going to go with the voices of authority in her head and keep tight control of the process? Or was she going to be open and flexible and go with the group's male energy which was to challenge every assumption about both the problem and its causes and approaches its solutions? As an authority on the subject and a passionate advocate for vulnerable women and children, her first impulse would have been to keep control of both the process and the content.

Instead, drawing on her ICL experience, in collaboration with Julie Schermer (Zeta Class), Layne took a process perspective. She convened a steering committee of 18 - 16 men and 2 women - and a process design team - affectionately called the itty-bitty-nitty-gritty-subcommittee - made up of diverse stakeholders, and built an agreement to hold a Boy's Conference that would:

- honor and celebrate growing up male;
- honor and celebrate different ways of being male;
- support connections between boys and their fathers and other male mentors;

- create a springboard within the community to better support healthy developmental relationships for boys.

The conference, held November 4, 2000, was an unqualifed success. The focus was the media's messages of violence associated with masculinity, especially in musical lyrics and images. 350 people attended; another 250 had to be turned away. A second annual conference in

planned for November 2, 2001. This year, the focus will be boyhood transitions - rites of passage - to manhood.

All that from one strategic moment.

Scarborough School Board and Town Council Recognized for Civil Budget Negotiations

It was a grand event, with good feelings all around. The stage was barely big enough to fit all the winners when the ICL presented the Collaborative Leadership Award to the Scarborough Town Council and the School Board. "They have made winners not only out of their two bodies, but also the taxpayers of Scarborough," said a beaming Tony Payne, Chair of the ICL Board, as he conferred the award.

It was an amazing turn of events. A year earlier would have told a different tale. Working on budgets, often zero-sum by nature, is seldom joyful. But in the Scarborough case, it was more likely to be acrimonious or downright hostile. A key to the shift was the fact that Bill Richards, school superintendent, was a member of the ICL Delta Class. In collaboration with the town manager, he convened a series of nine facilitated meetings with stakeholder representatives before the negotiations began. This helped the two bodies learn a new collaborative way for approaching negotiations. It included the same tried-and-true ICL principles: respectful listening, agreeing on the problem before pushing for a solution, clearer decision-making, and handling differences without rancor or ridicule.

In addition to these highly publicized results, there has been a steady stream of reports and accounts that document the broad-gauge impact of the ICL. A 5-year follow-up study of alumni conducted in 1998 found a robust 95% of respondents (over 50% responded) rated the core program "excellent" and many said it continues to impact their leadership styles and lives.

Congressman Tom Allen was a local attorney on the Portland City Council when he took the training in 1995. "I was very excited about the program at the time," he relates, "because, while I think I was already fairly collaborative in style, the techniques were incredibly helpful."

Asked if he could think of any application in his role as congressman, Allen replied after a long pause, "Yes, actually, when I was working on Campaign Finance Reform in the House with Asa Hutchinson, the skills I learned in the ICL training made a major difference in my effectiveness in holding the Democratic side together while he held the Republican side in line."

Anne Pringle was Mayor of Portland the first year of ICL. She reflects on the impact of the program over the years since and credits the program with providing a network of collaborative leaders who can approach issues from a similar mindset and move things forward without the adversarial tangles that would have prevailed before such a critical mass was available. "Take mental health issues. Rather than suffering through those deadly meetings in which nothing is accomplished, I can look around and see fellow ICL grads and say - hey, we don't have to put up with this. It was because of this common set of skills and mindsets we were able to succeed in setting up a local service network for mental health providers. We had learned a common set of dimensions at ICL around results, process, and relationships. This was invaluable, but it doesn't just happen. You have to call it up."

Richard Pattenaude, president of the University of Southern Maine, credits the Institute with a change in leadership style which now permeates the myriad projects of the university. He recognized the wisdom of Hird's radical vision back in '92: "Power has to be replaced by partnership, direction by dialogue." He adds, "Most projects don't crash because of content; they crash because of poor process, because people feel left out, double-crossed or misunderstood. A collaborative leader is honest with himself or herself and others, includes all parties, listens carefully and knows when to step aside and let 'followers' call the shots." He has seen the results "clearly and powerfully" at USM.

Consistent with the theory of the case, the new and expanding civic leadership of the region shows itself in a number of smaller, subtle ways. It is - as the founders intended - becoming embedded in "the fabric of the community." Examples abound where the unique assets and values of the ICL are on display:

      • consulting on Leadership for Tomorrow's Schools to forge a coalition for strategic

action;

• volunteering to facilitate community planning teams at the Governor's Service Institutes, Maine's follow-up to the President's Summit for Children;

• partnering with Delta Class (1996) graduate, Anne Jackson, to launch Portland Board Network, a project dedicated to recruiting, matching and training non-profit board members;

• hosting an annual Collaborative Leadership Awards Dinner each fall to recognize organizations and individuals whose efforts to build shared vision and trust among diverse citizens and interests have resulted in improved quality of life in the region and state;

• continuing education classes for alumni and others on topics ranging from advanced facilitation to conflict resolution;

• a critical mass of over 200 networked alumni linked by e-mail, fax phone and a common set of values, attitudes, skills and behaviors that comprise collaborative leadership;

• outreach to multicultural communities resulting in a more diverse Board of Directors and participant roster;

• friendship networks, bridge-building across the sectoral divides, are now cited as one of the most valued and lasting motivators to get involved and stay involved in the ICL and in the civic life of the community. This new type of personal development and camaraderie is what Robert Putnam calls "social capital," another name for trusting relationships. It is rapidly becoming a differentiator between successful and lagging regions in the global economy.

• lastly, one of the greatest benefits cited by graduates is developing the inner side of leadership. Dick Sawyer (Theta Class), a financial planner, puts it this way: "I thought I would learn a lot of skills and form some new friendships. And I have. But what I never figured was the personal transformation it has brought, especially from the dialogue on

diversity. Far from being the end of something, this is just the beginning of a whole rethinking of who I am and what I'm about. It is the most powerful learning experience I have ever had."

AN ONGOING PROCESS

Over the eight years since the first program was crafted, there has been a sea change in consciousness about civic engagement in America. In response to the alienation in the downsized workplace of the '90s, there has been an outpouring of ideas on revitalizing the human spirit, rebuilding community and bringing the soul to work. A vast literature has emerged documenting the rise of collaborative leadership and its several synonyms - civic entrepreneur, regional steward, servant leader. Indeed, there is an intense interest in leveraging "social capital" - networks, norms, and trust, the essence of ICL - as the essential ingredient in economic and social development around the globe.

Yet, for all of the success, there remains, of course, considerable room for improvement. The region still faces some thorny issues that have not yielded to the collaborative ethos. Each year we hear many of the same, intractable concerns being voiced by the new class of leaders, including:

- the need for a more skilled, inclusive approach to the region's growing ethnic and racial diversity;
- the 'digital divide,' the increasing disparity between the haves and have-nots in socioeconomic standing;
- workforce education to meet the new economy requirements;
- affordable health care;
- smart, sustainable, growth.

Other laments include the conflict laden "Roberts Rules" mentality still prevalent in

municipal and state public decision-making bodies. Those still working in hierarchical organizational cultures express alienation, their sensibilities now jarred by the gap between vision and reality. Many make mid- career changes, inspired by the power of a collaborative vision. Or, they are invited to by their colleagues who do not share their passion for collaboration. However, these frustrations are often mitigated by heartening accounts of informal interventions – 'facilitating from their seat' - learned at the ICL training.

Over the eight years, we have established that the Institute for Civic Leadership is a powerful lever for building civic capacity in Portland. Yet, it is no panacea. Human institutions do not yield their ingrained habits easily. It takes persistent, skillful effort and the passionate dedication of collaborative leaders over time. We do not know where the tipping point is, where it is safe to declare victory for collaborative values. Perhaps, as with democracy, these values persist by grace of eternal vigilance. All we can say with confidence is that for the vast majority of the 200 ICL graduates and the civic acumen of Portland, there is a demonstrable transformation. But it is always a journey without destination, just milestones along the way.

The future is a question of character for the next generation of "regional stewards" in Portland. Will they have the wisdom, the vision, the commitment, and the courage to put community first? To put compassion ahead of privilege? This will be a choice each generation of leaders must make for themselves.

 Whatever their choice, Portland inherits a solid foundation of social capital in the currency of collaborative leadership. Thanks to the Institute for Civic Leadership, the "leadership vacuum" is no longer an issue. And whether or not they choose to carry on the ICL tradition, they will be walking with the wind at their backs.

_____