

'Cincy in NYC' already paying dividends

Josh Pichler, jpichler@enquirer.com 9:13 a.m. EDT May 17, 2014

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(Photo: Craig Ruttle for The Enquirer)

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"Cincy in NYC" had barely concluded this week when it saw its first victory. In Israel.

Top business and civic leaders – including Tom Williams, Kay Geiger, Brian Carley and Santa Ono – were touring that country, sightseeing and networking. Their stops included Schneider Children's Medical Center of Israel.

Hospital director Joseph Press walked into the meeting and immediately started talking about Cincy in NYC, which wrapped up Monday. The seven-day event showcased the region's world-class arts community in New York City, while executives promoted Cincinnati's friendly business climate. It made an impression.

"The first thing Press says is that he knows of the energy in our city, and excellence of our arts, because he was just in New York and was amazed to be at Carnegie Hall and to see it filled with hundreds of Cincinnatians," said Julie Shifman, who organized Cincy in NYC and is on the Israel trip.

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It's just one story, but illustrates why the local business community rallied around Shifman's vision to promote this region in New York. The result was an unprecedented show of artistic excellence, including performances by the Cincinnati Ballet at the prestigious Joyce Theater, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall and seven celebrity Cincinnati chefs at the famous James Beard House.

Cincy in NYC complemented the growing realization that it was time for Cincinnati – which has established a global reputation for branding expertise – to start marketing itself. It was time to make an impression in other cities that have large companies looking to relocate or open a new hub, and young professionals looking for a place where they can make a difference.

The feedback in New York was positive. The arts events, and a party for young New York professionals with ties to this area, were sold out. Mayor John Cranley and Johnna Reeder, CEO of economic development group REDI Cincinnati, got 10 minutes on CNBC's "Squawk Box." Cranley also appeared on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

Organizers will meet in coming weeks to debrief and start thinking about future efforts. "The big question now is: 'What's next?'" Shifman said.

Answer No. 1: Follow up in New York

One answer involves following through on efforts made in New York. One way to measure the trip's success will be keeping an eye on national publications like Fortune, Forbes, the Wall Street Journal and Black Enterprise.

Cranley and business leaders including Melanie Healey of Procter & Gamble, Carl Satterwhite of RCF Group and Tim Schigel of Cintrifuse spent hours with top editors and reporters from those and other publications.

"Squawk Box" and "Morning Joe" offer high-impact but fleeting visibility. It's hard to tell this region's full story – redeveloped urban core, low cost of doing business, blooming startup scene, successful Minority Business Accelerator – in quick sound bites.

A Forbes or Fortune story, on the other hand, provides more depth and hits influential business readers across the globe. That's why civic and business leaders cheered in April when National Geographic profiled the city after months of reporting.

Julie Calvert, executive director of Source Cincinnati, is optimistic the New York trip will generate additional articles.

Her group was created in 2013 to "amplify the Cincinnati story."

"Nothing is guaranteed with the national media, but I think we all walked away thinking it couldn't have gone any better," Calvert said.

Answer No. 2: Take show to new cities

Source Cincinnati also is planning new trips to reach media beyond New York City. Calvert and her team are organizing a trip for four to six national publications to visit the region in September. Source Cincinnati also has preliminary plans to visit Chicago in the fall and target the business media and reporters who cover startups.

There are already ties between the two cities' startup communities. Chicago-based Hyde Park Venture Partners has announced two investments in Cincinnati companies. Another Chicago-based firm, Lightbank, recently offered Cincinnati startups 90 days of free space and services at its co-working space in Chicago.

Since February, Source Cincinnati has pitched Cincinnati stories to more than 125 reporters across the country. The end game would be a stream of Cincinnati stories in the national media and trade publications to complement the efforts of REDI, the region's economic development organization in charge of business recruitment and expansion.

Reeder spent last week in Manhattan meeting with media, executives and site selectors for New York and New Jersey companies. Before the trip, she said one measure of success would be this: "The next time I call a site selector, I don't have to explain why Cincinnati is a great community, they'll have already heard of us." ■

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