

Make it home

Annual UpDayton Summit at DAI

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN

OK, say you're a city. Your ability to thrive depends on having a whole lot of citizens milling around making life awesome. So how do you attract and retain the maximum amount of awesome? That's the question put forth every year at the UpDayton Summit. This Friday, we're going to get some answers.

UpDayton Director AJ Ferguson is one of our city's biggest advocates and a prime example of how the summit serves to retain young talent in our area. Inspired after attending 2012's summit, Ferguson chose to live and work in Dayton after graduating from the University of Dayton, where he received both a Bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and a Master's in renewable and clean energy. Since graduating from UD, Ferguson has had countless conversations with his friends about where to live and the reasons why.

"It's been extremely clear in those conversations that the characteristics of the location matters as much or more than the specific job opportunity," Ferguson says.

"Most of the people who stayed in Dayton had made some strong connection to the community during their time as students ... We share a vision of a thriving Dayton that is within reach, and we don't want to miss out on being part of that transformation."

The 2015 UpDayton Summit will be structured similarly to previous years' summits – peers and fellow leaders will join one of three breakout sessions where ideas will be presented for 2015 UpDayton projects.

"Breakout participants discuss the ideas and eventually vote on their three favorite ideas to receive \$1,000 in seed money and the support of UpDayton volunteers," Ferguson explains. "The event will close with insight and motivation from Detroit Future City, an



Bobby Walker shares ideas during last year's UpDayton Summit; photo: Briana Snyder Photography

organization charged with catalyzing Detroit's bold vision for the future."

So, what's in Dayton's future? How do we make the most of our assets and prime ourselves to thrive in the 21st century?

"Dayton is extremely well-positioned to make a splash with Millennials thanks to the low cost of living and downtown Dayton's growing vitality, but we need to take some big leaps forward if we hope to succeed," Ferguson says. "A new community-wide commitment to boldness, creativity and risk taking is essential. Millennials hate the status quo with a passion. Communities and businesses that are comfortable with big changes, with experimentation and innovation will win the hearts of Millennials. Millennials will return the favor by bringing jobs, businesses, investment and vibrancy to their neighborhoods."

Work-life balance is huge for Millennials. What do employers need to consider when dipping into the millennial work force?

"An employer's policies and culture typically make or break a young professional's work-life balance," Ferguson says. "The companies having the most success attracting young talent are those that offer flexible schedules, an energizing work environment, significant vacation time and other elements that enable



The 2015 UpDayton Summit will take place April 10 at the Dayton Art Institute; photo: Briana Snyder Photography

a lifestyle not overwhelmed by work." Dayton as a whole needs to not only put its best foot forward, but not be afraid to wiggle it around and say, "Hey! Check out this awesome foot!"

"Nobody is harder on Dayton than Dayton," City Manager Warren Price said at a recent meeting of the Neighborhood Leadership Institute.

Ferguson sees and hears the same.

"Our Midwest humility and contentment seem to hold us back from selling the exceptional product we already can offer as a community," Ferguson says. "I've heard many outsiders offer this critique of our local organizations and communities. If the Millennials are going to come to Dayton, they need to start encountering our brand and our story."

What do we have going for us? A lot.

"Dayton is a great place to live and play," Ferguson says. "Our parks, trails, arts, festivals and neighborhoods can compete. Our challenge is to make sure young professionals hear about and discover them."

Now in its eighth year, UpDayton has clearly made a place for itself in our community. What has to happen to keep UpDayton's momentum going?

"UpDayton's momentum depends on the enthusiasm and support of volunteers and community partners," Ferguson says. "We must continue to offer significant and tan-

gible value to these stakeholders in order to sustain our momentum. We do so by connecting energetic volunteers to the resources and leaders that can bring their ideas to life.

"Our community partners depend on us to bring fresh, young voices and new ways of thinking to the table. We'll continue listening to the needs and aspirations of these partners and the community as a whole so that the organization can continue to adapt and lead in new ways."

The 2015 UpDayton Summit will take place Friday, April 10, 2-6 p.m., at the Dayton Art Institute, 456 Belmonte Park N in Grafton Hill. Want to be involved but can't make it to the Summit? A follow-up event to launch the projects and recruit volunteers to support them will be held in the near future. For more about UpDayton or to register for the Summit, visit updayton.city or their Facebook page at facebook.com/updayton.



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