

# Milwaukee: A city of promise or a city slowly falling?

Contributed by Thomas Keeley

To most native Milwaukeeans, Milwaukee is indeed a great city.

Milwaukee has many features that are truly Milwaukee, including the great festival scene in the summer, the great restaurants we have citywide and finally, many would have a hard time arguing that the people in Milwaukee, are unlike the people anywhere else.

While Milwaukee might look like a great city on a postcard and may be a hot spot for 10 days during the summer, the reality is that the other 355 days of the year, Milwaukee is falling deeper and deeper into a potentially irreversible abyss. Historically, Milwaukee has been a city that was quite familiar with the term growth and development. From the early 1900's to the mid 1950's, Milwaukee was one of the fastest growing cities with one of the fastest growing business markets.

In the past, Milwaukee was continually ranked a leading city for various industries as well as growth in the workforce. Milwaukee was known as "Beer City USA", however even that name has only become a pastime to the city, and now Milwaukee stands in a distant second to the Anheiser-Busch company, which produces almost twice as many barrels per year.

As time progressed, Milwaukee saw itself falling further and further behind the cities that it was so closely in line with. Quite quickly, Milwaukee started losing jobs, losing employees and losing a grasp on the economic stability as well as the potential for growth the city once had.

Between 1960 and 1970, Milwaukee's population increased nearly 100,000, quickly moving Milwaukee ahead in the ranks of the fastest growing cities. However, between 1970 and 1980, Milwaukee lost over 80,000 of its residents and then from 1980 to 2000, Milwaukee lost nearly 30,000 more residents.

Quick math: from 1960 to 2000, the city of Milwaukee has lost over 140,000 residents.

For us native Milwaukeeans, we would like to assume that a factor in that was things that only us Milwaukeeans can handle, the weather, the smell of yeast while being stuck in construction that seems to be never-ending, maybe some would like to think that maybe it's because they couldn't handle calling something a bubbler.

In reality, there is one main issue that has led to so many people leaving the city and relocating to other cities, or simply moving out to the suburbs: Jobs.

In 2003, Milwaukee ranked 44th amongst the 50 largest cities in unemployment rate (higher ranking cities = lower unemployment rates) keeping the same ranking as that it had in 2002.

There are many people out there who would blame this situation on the fact that Milwaukee was socialist way back when and we are still recovering and trying to get our grasps back on our economy again. Well, that seems like a good argument, however looking at the same ranking list that had Milwaukee ranked 44th in 2003, that same list shows Milwaukee as being 27th in 1990 and even making the top 20 list (having lower unemployment) 1992 and 1993.

The problem with Milwaukee's business climate is not leadership blunders from 20, 30 or even 60 years ago, the problem with Milwaukee's business climate is the lack of motivation from our elected officials (yes Tommy B., I am talking about you) to sell the city.

Being active in politics, I have gotten to hear Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker speak on many occasions. He, like Tom Barrett, has the power and knowledge to influence businesses to come here. However, Scott Walker can only do so much without the cooperation of Milwaukee's best friend, Tommy B.

Aside from Scott Walker, other people and/or organizations have been going to many lengths to try and build up this city and from getting the chance to meet these people and listen to them speak; they too have the right idea for what direction Milwaukee should be going in.

But again, my question remains, where is Tom Barrett?

There is an organization in Milwaukee called the MMAC (Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce) that has some of the greatest business minds in the country and they have taken it upon themselves to market Milwaukee and show people what our city has to offer. Though they aren't the mayor, they have seen great success.

As mentioned, Milwaukee indeed has a lot to offer, though it goes beyond the festivals, the food and bubbler.

Milwaukee is a city that is full of people who have a work ethic that is second to none and the drive to make sure this city remains a great place. As the job numbers reflect, there are a lot of people in this city who don't have a job, thus, giving Milwaukee even more appeal for a company that might be interested in moving here.

Beyond that, Milwaukee has a continually growing post-secondary education system that has already turned out some of the greatest minds in business. UWM for example, is a campus that has turned out DA's and even fortune 500 CEO's.

However, even though we have this great city with all of this potential, what is "the man with the plan", the guy we elected (Tommy B.) really doing?

While his office may put out a press release every now and then speaking of all these great projects and things happening, a majority of those are press releases restating the success of someone else, someone with an entrepreneurial spirit, and someone with a vision for the city.

Tom Barrett ran with a 100 day plan, if you look through old newspapers, you will realize that after those 100 days, Tom Barrett pretty much fell off the face of the earth.

As a college student, there should be great concern for the direction that this city is going (even for non-college students). Currently, Milwaukee is falling even further down the rankings and sadly, even though many students will

come to Milwaukee to go to college, not many of them will stay here.

Tom Barrett needs to wake up and take action and lead this city. Scott Walker is doing a good job leading the county; Tim Sheehy (MMAC) is doing a great job and doing what he can to keep local business owners here and try to bring new ones in. Though these people are both doing great jobs to keep this city great, the one man who should be doing more simply isn't.

To Mayor Barrett, this is my advice to you:

You are a smart man, you have experience and I know somewhere you have the vision. However, you are going to soon be finding yourself in a position where you will have wished that you could go back in time and use the opportunities that you have today to make this city great again.

Instead of focusing on issues that have continually been problems and are going to be problems that will take years to fix, focus on the things that you can do now, that will have a long lasting positive impact on our city.

I urge you to work with the neighboring suburbs that have seen positive growth and encourage expanding companies that the city is a great place to live and do business, also take that message across the country.

Second, instead of just looking at bringing new talent here, you might also want to consider making Milwaukee more appealing for those that are here now. I have been at UWM for a few years now and I am having a hard time recalling the last time you spoke there on keeping students in Milwaukee after graduation (I must have been out of town, right?)

Finally, Mr. Mayor, this is my last piece of advice to you, use the MEDIA! Yes, you are probably furious with this article thinking to yourself "I have had that idea for years" or "I was going to try that next", or even "I am working on it", but you need to realize that if you don't market yourself (just like you should market the city), the people aren't going to know who you are, or where you stand. I have been tempted to file a missing persons report to find my mayor! If you're alive, please respond.