

## **Mayor on hotel effort, Collaboration Award: Proof of a ‘healthy city’**

**by Alex Hummel - Wednesday, September 19, 2012**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/21197/mayor-on-hotel-effort-collaboration-award-proof-of-a-healthy-city/>

If cities, like thriving neighborhoods, are going to make it, they require “neighbors banding together” and investments that “make economic sense” and “increase the financial and social equity.”

So, according to the city’s mayor, Oshkosh got it right when partners including the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation, the University of Oshkosh Foundation, two regional hoteliers and the city council and taxpayers got behind the [shared effort and investment to resurrect their downtown’s struggling riverfront hotel](#).

“What we had was people banding together to deal with the problem,” said city of Oshkosh Mayor Burk Tower, after accepting the UW Oshkosh Foundation’s Collaboration in Action Award at its 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to the Community Breakfast on Sept. 18.

“I think what this shows is we are indeed a healthy city,” Tower said.

An audience of about 200 UW Oshkosh faculty and staff, community and regional leaders, business executives and state and Congressional legislators and their representatives attended the 2012 breakfast which, annually, spotlights the growing array of on-and-off campus partnerships helping the University fulfill its mission while serving students, the region and the state.

### **Alumnus examines ‘democracy vs. democrazy’**

The event also featured keynote speaker and UW Oshkosh alumnus Blois Olson, a 1994 political science and journalism graduate who is currently principal of Fluence Media, a Minneapolis-based strategic communications firm. The company provides high-level media and communications strategy, visualization and insights, content creation and distribution and marketing.

Fluence, under Olson’s leadership, has also become a shrewd observer and commentator on political trends on talk radio in Minnesota, particularly in examining the fickleness of modern Midwestern voters in the past few national elections.

“They don’t know which way to go, they don’t know where they have been and they are exhausted,” Olson said.

He characterizes the daily, 24/7, often-divisive, red-vs.-blue politics in American media an example of “democrazy,” with a cast of “angertainers” bombarding people with lesser-informed opinions, pushing them to the margins of the political spectrum and contributing to the pendulum swings in elections from cycle to cycle.

“It’s an electorate that is changing its mind every two years,” Olson said, highlighting Wisconsin’s shifting red-and-blue complexion in recent elections.

Olson and Fluence also pay close attention to the evolving role of social media in politics. It’s throwing pollsters a curveball, given the ability for voters – however unscientifically – to use YouTube to Twitter to instantly weigh in on candidates and their comments and stances.

While the voting populous may be divided, they are coming together on one thing: Twitter. Olson said one in five online adults used Twitter for political purposes in 2010. He referred to it as an example of the “democratization of media.”

“That constant opening – that constant feedback – is something officials have to be aware of,” he said.

### **‘A knack for high-impact collaborations’**

Olson’s survey of the fractious forces in national politics was tempered by the UW Oshkosh Foundation’s spotlight on the surging tide of cooperation beyond the bounds of campus.

Tower and Oshkosh City Manager Mark Rohloff accepted the Collaboration in Action award for the city’s role in supporting the downtown City Center hotel revitalization project. They and UW Oshkosh Foundation President Arthur Rathjen acknowledged the essential partnership of both community and University foundations, private hotel business leaders and city investors – Oshkosh taxpayers.

“This is the core group that came up with a novel concept and brought the concept to reality,” Tower said. “They executed.”

The Collaboration in Action award was created to recognize an individual or organization in northeastern Wisconsin who advances the mission of the University and whose efforts impact educational, cultural and economic change. The hotel project and its city partners hit the mark in multiple ways.

The Oshkosh Common Council approved \$3 million in public assistance for the renovation of the hotel, which helped the UW Oshkosh Foundation and local hoteliers Richard Batley of RB Hospitality in Neenah and John Pfefferle of Pfefferle Companies, Inc. in Appleton, secure bank financing for the balance of the estimated \$14 million acquisition and renovation of the property.

Targeted to open in 2013, the 176-room waterfront property will be a full-service, state-of-the-art business hotel, anchoring the city’s downtown and serving as an economic catalyst for the entire community.

“The hotel will complement the revitalized, attached Oshkosh Convention Center & Visitors Bureau and its efforts to showcase Wisconsin’s Event City, and enhance nearby UW Oshkosh’s vibrant academic conference business,” Rathjen said. “It will also bring new downtown jobs and economic energy to Oshkosh retail storefronts, cafes, performance venues and other businesses aligned with the city’s ongoing redevelopment efforts.”

The University, which has developed a reputation as one of the nation’s leading, sustainable institutions,

has committed to using the hotel as “an additional source of public good,” Rathjen said. Some annual revenues, after operations begin, will support city of Oshkosh high school graduates’ pursuit of college degrees and new academic programs at UW Oshkosh.

“This project is one more example of Oshkosh’s knack for high-impact collaborations,” he said. “They improve our city’s economy and quality of life.”

### **Other collaborative projects in the works**

Rathjen also updated breakfast guests on the UW Oshkosh Foundation’s collaborative work to [develop a second “Biodigester” facility](#) at Wisconsin’s largest dairy farm, Rosendale Dairy, near Pickett. The energy and research facility, planned to also feature a public education center, will rely on UW Oshkosh students and faculty in environmental studies program who will work with farm operator Milksource to maximize the production of biogas – energy-rich methane – by processing the site’s livestock waste.

Simultaneously, the Foundation is successfully working with alumni and other private donors to support and break ground on the campus’ [\\$12 million Alumni Welcome and Conference Center](#), a dynamic new facility billed as “the University’s new front door.”

Planned at the nexus of Wisconsin Street and the Fox River, the center will serve as a state-of-the-art, easily-accessible, public greeting and event hub, featuring alumni and corporate meeting spaces, a banquet hall and University offices. Groundbreaking is planned for mid-October.

Breakfast guests were invited to tour [Horizon Village, the first new residence hall at UW Oshkosh in 40 years](#) and another demonstration of the University’s commitment to sustainable construction and living. The 350-student hall features a planted, “green roof,” geothermal energy sources and other environmentally-friendly nuances that will earn it LEED status from the U.S. Green Building Council.

“UW Oshkosh is a vibrant, dynamic and entrepreneurial campus made even stronger by the collaborations we celebrate here today,” Rathjen said.

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh Foundation](#)