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Will Hartford live into, or outlive its relevancy?

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Hartford's golden age of development is upon us. The right pieces are falling into place to have Hartford step into its own as a city. As Hartford begins to grow, it is vital that it also find its own identity. It would be a shame to see this city's renaissance and potential end up with Hartford being "just like" or "similar to" so many other small cities. We are capable of better, of being an expression of the values of our people and relevant to the world we have created; to be Hartford, a city that is one-of-a-kind.

Unbreakable

I take my boys for haircuts at this great barbershop on Park Rd. in West Hartford. Stepping through the door is like going back in time 50 years. On rows of vintage barbershop chairs with decades of patina sit patrons of all ages each with a bit of powdered sugar or jelly on their cheeks from the freshly made donuts that are handed out to patrons every Saturday morning. On the counter at the register is a "take one free" box of black rubber combs. All over the box in bold '50s era typography are the words declaring "unbreakable." Do you remember these?

The little known revolution
of the 1960s

I never knew why the absurdity of a comb whose claim to fame was its ability to defy being broken stuck with me until now. In doing some research for this article, it seems that before 1960 combs were either made of brittle materials like bone, primitive plastic resins, lacquer and wood, or metal. Metal combs being expensive and rare had most of us using combs that if dropped on any hard surface would break into pieces. So in 1960 when we had a handle on this new petroleum-based material called plastic the unbreakable comb was invented.

For the first time, men and women could carry a comb in their pocket, pocketbook or wallet and never worry about it breaking again. The best part, they were inexpensive and effective! The unbreakable plastic comb was the epitome of relevant - and flew off the shelves. Now, 55 years later they still exist, marketed with the same value proposition, "Unbreakable". Of course, there's no pressing need to re-invigorate the market for these combs as they are mostly given away free.

A living relic

I find this whole thing fascinating, like seeing a dinosaur still alive. This product whose value proposition had outlived its relevancy for so long, we forget a time when it was relevant. It also serves as a powerful warning for all of us working to realize Hartford's potential.

Finding Hartford's identity and relevancy is not something that is ever done; it is an ongoing and evolving exploration. The minute the identity and relevancy of the new unbreakable comb was revealed to the world, its importance slowly began to diminish, until the world had changed and left it behind.

Three critical conversations

To not be left behind, or worse, never find ourselves and how we fit into the world, Hartford's identity needs to be built upon three critical things:

- * What the people of the city of Hartford and surrounding communities care about, believe in and are committed to
- * What the most important needs of our community (city, county, state and region) are that Hartford is in a unique position to fill
- * Where the values, beliefs and commitments of the people meet the needs of the community.

If we are able to have these first two points be the most important conversations we pay attention to, like we would our closest friend, and the relationship between them cared for like a we would our own child, I believe we would have everything we need to reveal Hartford's unique identity and to develop a position that is relevant to our world. This understanding needs to be established, and maintained for all to see, and contribute to.

We wait for no one!

Following the spirit of my other posts, and having no tolerance for waiting for someone else to do it, I will start this conversation right here, right now.

As a someone who could benefit from Hartford realizing its potential:

- * What do you care most about?
- * What are you committed to contributing?
- * What do you believe Hartford's success could allow for?
- * What do you need most from your community, state, and region?

Put your thoughts in the comments, and share these questions with those you would like to see contribute. Lets just see what happens...

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