

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

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OPINION

Keep it goin'

The salvation of more than 1,000 jobs that were headed for extinction at the Cleveland office of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service is a testament to what can be accomplished when diverse organizations and individuals work together for a common purpose. The joint effort put forth to keep the local DFAS operation alive and kickin' should serve as a model of cooperation not only in response to crisis situations, but also for how various groups can coalesce to advance the broader economic interests of Northeast Ohio.

Civic leaders recognized in late 2003 that much was at stake for Cleveland as the Defense Department pondered how to consolidate its various DFAS operations nationwide. Carol Caruso, senior vice president for government advocacy at the Greater Cleveland Partnership, was chief among the individuals who helped mobilize the troops in the effort to keep the Cleveland DFAS center off the list of operations the Pentagon would designate for closure.

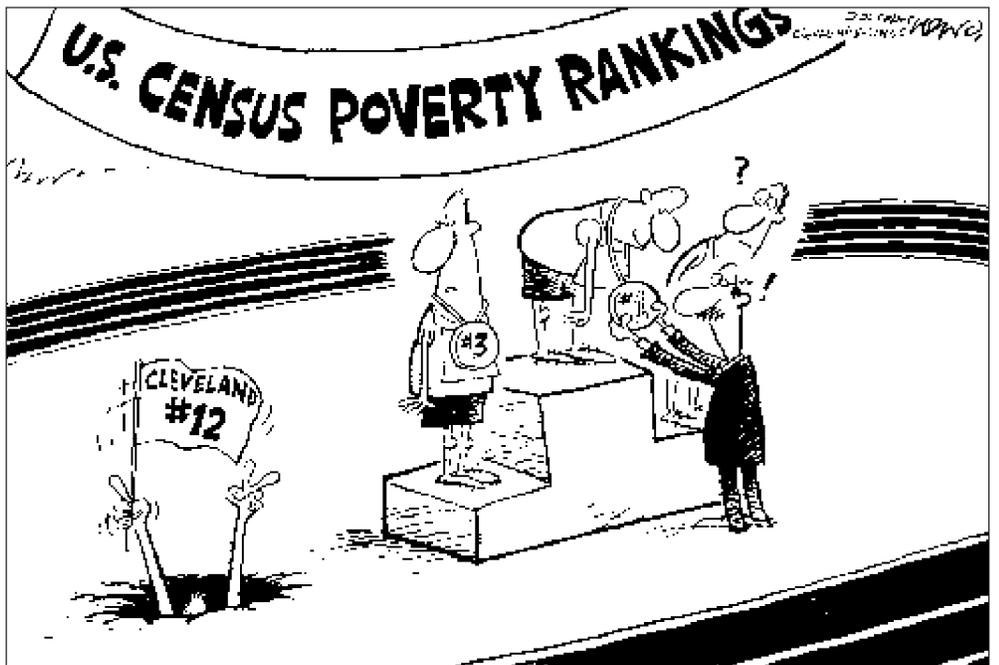
That push would evolve into the formation of the Cleveland Defense Industry Alliance. And, unlike some groups bearing names that don't reflect their true nature, this group truly worked as an alliance. There were business leaders, most visible among them attorney Fred Nance, who chaired the alliance and pressed its case before the Base Closure and Realignment Commission; business organizations such as the Greater Cleveland Partnership and regional economic development group Team NEO; and members of the local congressional delegation, with Rep. Steve LaTourette playing the biggest role as he cut staff member Debbie Setliff loose to dig into—and ultimately show as bogus—the suspiciously high rent costs the Pentagon had used to help justify the planned job cuts at the Cleveland DFAS office.

By now, the rest of the story is well-known. Their hard work was rewarded late last month when the base closure commission soundly rejected the Defense Department's proposal to move most of Cleveland's DFAS work elsewhere, and instead issued a consolidation recommendation that could result in hundreds of new DFAS jobs coming to town.

It's a victory worth celebrating. But once the excitement over this accomplishment dies down, we hope the cooperative spirit that made it possible doesn't die with it. The fight to "save DFAS" showed what is possible when a community, in the true sense of the word, pulls together to achieve a goal. Let's keep that spirit going.

We're No. 12!

Cleveland last week finally escaped the designation of America's poorest city when the latest Census Bureau figures indicated that the number of city residents who live below the poverty line had plunged over a 12-month period. But even if the census numbers are credible—and we're not sure they are—it's still no honor to be the 12th most impoverished city in the country. Without a proper education to compete for jobs in a global economy, the road out of poverty will continue to lead to a dead end for too many Clevelanders.



COMMENTARY

City rankings change, problems remain

So we can start the celebrating: Cleveland is no longer America's officially sanctioned center of urban poverty. That dubious distinction has fallen to our cousins to the west in the Motor City.

The response in both cities should be the same and can be summed up in a single word: Whoa.

According to statistics released last week by the U.S. Census Bureau, Cleveland is now tied with pre-Katrina New Orleans as having the 12th-highest percentage of its populace living at or below poverty level. The feds say Detroit is now the poorest, followed by El Paso, Miami, Newark and Atlanta.

The fact is that we shouldn't have stewed about it as much as we did when Cleveland was at the top of the list, nor should Detroit. Both our cities are struggling with the same issues that need attention: a wrenching change in their economic bases, decades of suburban flight that has degraded their physical

infrastructures and school systems, and the mountain of societal problems caused by too many kids in one-parent households.

As an aside, how seriously can you judge a standard-of-living survey that has a city like Cleveland swing 12 points better in a year in which nothing much changed in the economy? Even trained demographics experts question the validity of this survey, which is only five years old and based on a rather slim slice of the population.

Again, this doesn't mean Cleveland and Detroit don't face serious problems. It just means our political and civic leaders must stay the course and work on whatever we can do to breathe more life into this city and its region.

ONE OF THE THINGS with a long history of making this town and its surrounding area a better place is the United Way campaign, which was kicked

off last week downtown with the annual pancake breakfast. Volunteers served up some 7,500 pancakes to the largest crowd yet, and KeyCorp chairman and CEO Henry Meyer announced this year's goal of \$43.5 million.

That's a drop from last year's \$45.7 million, but is probably a smart goal considering the loss of major companies from our region.

Clevelanders, which I use interchangeably with Northeast Ohioans, have a long history of being national leaders in giving to communitywide social service campaigns (originating with the old Community Chest), and I'm sure they'll be there again this year.

For the campaign to be successful, it needs small businesses like never before. Please call 216-436-2100 or visit the website as www.uws.org.

It's only a matter of time before you or someone in your company will be touched by a United Way agency. The only way to make sure there's help when we need it is for all of us to contribute now.

BRIAN TUCKER



THE BIG ISSUE

Will you support the relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina?



RANDY DEHAVEN
Middleburg Heights
Probably. It's a national crisis. I feel we should all support the effort.



FAYE THORNTON
Cleveland
I already have. Those people are in need and they have less than I do.



JAVIER PACHECO
Cleveland
I hadn't planned on it, but nobody has approached me.



ALIDA STRUZE
Lakewood
Of course. We want to help people who are in trouble. If I were in that situation, I would want people to help me.

➤ Let us know what you think. Vote in our online poll at www.CrainCleveland.com