

Historic preservation requires communication, leaders who listen

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Bardstown may be back at the forefront of the historic preservation field after a local man's doctoral dissertation explored leadership in the local preservation movement.



Peter Trzop

Peter Trzop earned his Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership from Argosy University in December. Through his education, Trzop said he's been drawn back to his roots: as a graduate student he wrote his thesis on historic preservation in Bardstown. So in completing his doctoral capstone, he decided to explore that topic again from a leadership perspective.

"I grew up in Bardstown," Trzop said. "It's obviously a very historic place that has ... a very powerful influence on you."

As it turned out, it was a new idea in the field of leadership studies.

"We found gaps in understanding how leadership — and I'm not talking management, I'm talking leadership — how leadership works in a successful district like the one in Bardstown," said Dr. Randy Heinrich, Trzop's dissertation chair. "What we see is largely a gap in how do you train leaders in historic preservation to get the big picture, to account for all the moving parts."

Heinrich added that the dissertation introduced him to the "unique challenges" involved in running a historic district.

The dissertation, titled "A Phenomenological Study of Emergent Historic Preservation Leadership Activities for the Bardstown, Kentucky, Historic District," interviews five "sub-groups": local "activist-historians," contractors, homeowners, nonprofit staff and planning and zoning staff on the most important qualities contributing to the success of a historic preservation movement.

In 1967, Bardstown passed the first historic-zoning legislation in Kentucky.

"Given that Bardstown is one of the first in the state and the first in the nation, it's only appropriate that this study, that is in many ways the first of its type, would propel Bardstown back into the limelight," Trzop said.

And Bardstown, where more than 300 structures have been preserved, proved a great place to initiate the study of what makes a great leader in the field.

"By all accounts Bardstown would be that successful district," Trzop said. "We have a lot of preserved houses. I think anybody in the HRB [Historical Review Board] would back that claim. I think a lot of people in business would back that claim, as well."

The Kentucky Department of Travel backs the claim, too, estimating that tourism has brought more than 1,300 jobs and more than \$67 million in investments to Nelson County.

Priorities in leadership

Twenty-three local people were interviewed for the dissertation, though their names are kept anonymous as a way of encouraging honest responses. Trzop said it was never his intention to provide an outline for how preservationists "should" act — instead, he wanted to listen and learn.

But five themes were common to all five sub-groups of people Trzop interviewed: "1. increase community participation, education and communication relating to historic preservation; 2. reduce favoritism and subjectivity to increase consistency and fairness in the historic-

preservation process; 3. economic consideration by leaders for historic-preservation work by property and business owners; 4. property rights versus historic-preservation zoning laws; 5. important attributes of leaders."

Increasing communication between different interests, such as contractors and the planning commission, seemed to be a central concern for many of those interviewed.

"It says, look, if you're going to have a meeting about historic review, maybe talk to these subgroups specifically — target them," Trzop explained. "Maybe government could communicate in more like a dialogue — more two-way communication."

He encouraged local leaders and those interested in historic preservation to read his dissertation as a way to gain insight into the perspectives of others. Call Trzop at 233-4585 or e-mail him at ptrzop@hotmail.com to learn more about obtaining a copy.

"A good leader might look at that and say, OK, that's something that people have talked about. ... How do we actually make this happen in the real world?" Trzop said. "We have been doing things very well, but we could always do better, and I think good leaders look at things like that."

These themes provide clues on why historic preservation is working in Bardstown, and helps researchers "see what people are doing on a local level," rather than simply theorizing, Trzop explained.

"I think Pete came out of it with an incredible, deep appreciation for how when you throw the pebble on a pond, the way the ripples ... affect people very differently," Heinrich said.

Local leadership

Trzop cited a number of local sources in his dissertation, including books by historian Dixie Hibbs, pamphlets from historian David Hall and articles from The Kentucky Standard.

Hibbs said, although she has not read the dissertation, keeping lines of communication open and encouraging leaders to listen are of resounding importance to the historic district's success.

More than anything, a preservationist must have a passion for historic preservation, she said, pointing to the work of her late husband, Franklin Hibbs Jr., who served on the HRB for 26 years.

"The interested people are willing to give their time — which is worth more than money most of the time," Hibbs said. "Preservationists are doing this for the love of the buildings and the atmosphere. They don't do it for money. They don't do it for glory."

When Hibbs was mayor of Bardstown in the early 2000s, she said that in the Historical Review Board, "there was definitely a movement toward more enforcement, less advisement."

Joint City-County Planning Commission Director Janet Johnston-Crowe agreed. "There needs to be added communication, and I think one thing that makes us different from other communities that also have historic zoning is that we've had historic zoning for so long that it's become more regulatory — 'This is what you have to do,'" she said.

This is not because historic zoning regulations have become stricter, she said: "There's nothing that says 'you shall.'"

Instead, there needs to be more public awareness about what historic zoning regulations try to accomplish — a role that has been filled through awareness campaigns by nonprofit or non-governmental groups in other communities. "[There is a] perception that it is regulatory in nature,

that there's not really a purpose for it," she said. "Because it's been in existence so long we don't have that buy-in that you would typically have by creation of a new district."

Providing expertise — suggesting paint colors, giving advice to contractors who haven't worked on old houses — without forcing particular decisions on people is the best approach, Hibbs said.

"Leadership is not standing by and saying, 'You apply to me and we'll say whether we accept it or not,'" Hibbs said. "Leadership is not dictatorship. It is gathering people together to come up with the right results. ... One person's ideas are good but 10 persons' ideas are 10 times better."

Heinrich suggested that as a result of Trzop's process of interviewing 23 community leaders, leaders might be thinking more critically about what contributes to Bardstown's success.

"Perhaps people are talking differently to each other

today. Perhaps people are thinking about things a little differently, because his questions were very probing and very deep," Heinrich said.

This research is only the beginning, Trzop said. He hopes researchers will be inspired to study leadership in other historic preservation movements.

"We see this as a starting point, and maybe somebody else wants to study four or five other small towns," he said. "As that grows — that database — then you can make more claims, if you will."

"He was looking for and found trends that may eventually evolve into models or trends that will help us understand how to effectively run a historic district," Heinrich said.

Trzop said he has been approached by several parties to publish his dissertation as a book.

Dinner provides platforms for political figures

Luallen featured as keynote speaker

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For one evening, Democratic representatives and candidates will have an opportunity to discuss their political platforms with members of the community.



Crit Luallen

It's a part of the annual Nelson County Democratic Jefferson/Jackson Dinner, which is 6 p.m. Friday at the Maywood Country Club, 130 Maywood Ave. Tickets are \$30 in advance or \$35 at the door.

According to Margie Bradford, committee chairwoman of the Bardstown-Nelson County

Democratic Executive Committee, the event is the annual fundraiser for the Democratic committee and the Nelson County Women's Club.

"It's an exciting evening," she said, noting that several prominent political figures will attend. For example, former State Auditor Crit Luallen will be featured as the keynote speaker.

During the first portion of the night, community members will be able to partake in a meet-and-greet with Democratic candidates and representatives during a cocktail reception.

A buffet dinner will be served at 7 p.m. and the program will begin at 7:30 p.m.

Once the program begins, Luallen will take the stage. In the past, she has served as secretary of the executive cabinet, state

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