

## **City Club Address – Terry Mazany**

**June 12, 2017**

I want to thank Jay and the City Club for once again providing me with this opportunity to share my thoughts about the state of our community.

I hope you enjoyed your lunchtime conversations and learned new and interesting things about your experiences with *On the Table*.

This is terrific timing to reflect on what we learned and heard from our fellow residents during the fourth year of *On the Table*. I want to thank City Club for being a part of the day, organizing its own tables as only the City Club can.

It also turns out that my remarks today can be viewed as a bookend to David Reifman's presentation last week. David gave us a citywide view of new investments coming to our region. I will share insights heard from our fellow residents that can give us something to think about as we consider those new investments.

For all the self-described "shock and awe" of David's presentation, I think he buried the headline. Our city and our mayor are being incredibly innovative in finding ways to finance new development. They are creating new tools for funding underserved neighborhoods where the traditional markets are not working – that was brilliant! We were treated to a preview of the Neighborhood Opportunity Fund that awarded 32 grants totaling \$3.2 million last Thursday to businesses on the South and West sides.

The need for this was underscored during last week's Global Cities forum hosted by the Council on Global Affairs. It is clear that federal and state governments are now much less able to provide the type of funding required for cities to flourish.

The steps our city is taking are not just about being smart, but core to our survival and vitality. These investments in our most struggling neighborhoods are an important part of what it will take to bring about a more inclusive Chicago where everyone matters and everyone is at the table.

Columnist David Brooks frequently talks about the decline in social capital and social trust in our communities. In one column he asked the question: “What is the central challenge facing our era? His answer: “Social isolation.” A reality especially true for communities down the income scale.

Brooks goes on to cite studies showing that the rise of distrust correlates with a decline in community bonds. Distrust also feeds self-reinforcing spirals: parents who experience distrust are less likely to teach their children about tolerance and respect for others.

This experience has life and death consequences when the result is distrust of law enforcement passed on from parents to children.

Here in Chicago our challenge is even greater because the visible and invisible barriers erected by the enduring legacy of segregation reinforce social isolation and block the formation of bonds of social capital that can only form when people are proximate to each other.

You know the data as well as I do. The disparities that have been measured and documented in virtually every facet of life – housing and safe communities, access to capital and small business loans, food security and health care, education attainment and employment, income and wealth, and, of course, unequal justice and mass incarceration.

Every few months or so, a new report comes out to remind us of these realities. Most recently, the UIC Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy released their report entitled: *A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago* that examines the

disparities experienced by not just by African American residents, but Latino residents as well.

And there's the really smart study produced by the Metropolitan Planning Council and Urban Institute on the Cost of Segregation. This was funded by the Trust as part of our broader strategy to address racial inequity.

What this study reveals is an incredible self-inflicted wound hindering our economic progress: the loss of \$4 billion in income, \$8 billion in regional gross domestic product, \$6 billion in real estate value, 83,000 more people who most likely would have college degrees.

At the end of the day, we all want to see figures like these reversed. But how to get there is how we get bogged down.

I believe we all have a clear sense of the problem, but the question remains: What can we do about this?

There's no one entity or solution. We have to come at this from all directions all at once. It is about residents and grassroots leaders seated side-by-side with those who hold the formal levers of power and influence. It's about proximity.

One approach that the Trust has taken is rooted in the oldest of human traditions, breaking bread together and sharing a meal that invites, includes, honors, respects and listens to the diverse voices and identities of our fellow community members. When we respect another's identity, we affirm their basic human dignity.

We bring people together through *On the Table* to create empathy that leads to mutual trust and social cohesion. These things are foundational to bring about any of the changes that are needed to achieve the outcomes that we desire.

These are the conversations that we need to have more often, but most often don't.

For its part, the Trust is convener and catalyst to tap the transformative potential of tens of thousands of residents working together to imagine and create a new shared future. The real magic happens when organizations and individuals start using *On the Table* as a platform to achieve their own goals. Our commitment is to offer a seat at the table for those not typically invited, invite them to share their stories, and help them turn their stories into actions that make a difference for their lives.

But the real impact of *On the Table* is far deeper. Our shared conversations validate, honor and respect the basic dignity of each and every person at the table. Our discussions bind us together in a stronger community with common and shared interests. We transform hopelessness into hope, cynicism into caring, disdain into compassion.

Each year I immerse myself in *On the Table* and this year I was joined by John White, the Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer who documented my day and brought us many of the images you have enjoyed today on the screen. I am grateful for his friendship and keen eye that beautifully renders the stories I will share.

I began May 16 – *On the Table* Day — at a breakfast co-hosted by Sequane Lawrence of **Chicago Center for Art and Technology** and Carrie Thomas of **Chicago Jobs Council**, both of whom are here today. ChiCAT and CJC invited a diverse group of guests to their table to explore a specific topic: co-ops. In a co-operative business model, ownership is shared by a group of workers rather than one or a few individuals. Co-ops can mean a completely different experience for workers and communities – one of greater individual empowerment and prosperity more widely shared.

But in Chicago, co-operative business models are not widely understood or practiced. This *On the Table* conversation brought together a powerful set of minds – nonprofit leaders, a lawyer, an architect, a banker – to discuss how we might encourage the growth of co-ops

locally in order to improve conditions and build more wealth for our residents and communities.

We heard from Armando Robles, who is a founder and owner of New Era, a co-operative that manufactures windows and doors. His group calls itself New Era because they hope it will be an inspiration for how future jobs can be created in America. Armando told us that the challenges of starting and managing a co-op become their own rewards as workers learn to come together as a team to solve problems and to seize opportunities. As one visitor to New Era put it, “If you saw how engaged the workers are at this factory, you would think they own the place.” And, indeed, they do.

Armando’s testimony inspired the group to commit to keep meeting in pursuit of this transformational idea of encouraging the growth of co-ops in our region.

Why is this important? Co-ops could provide a very real solution to the challenges posed by our rapidly changing economy – an economy where automation and the efficiency imperative threaten to not only destroy our jobs, but to strip the meaning out of the jobs that remain.

New Era is an example of ways to create quality jobs driving inclusive growth that affirms human dignity.

The thing about *On the Table* conversations is that they are inherently optimistic. During the course of a single meal you can observe the transformation from hopelessness to hopefulness. In the case of the CHICAT table, it was well summed by the statement: “we are participating in a movement to transform our economy.” Now that’s a big deal.

There is a commitment to stay at the table and to stay focused on the challenge. Said one person: “If we can struggle effectively and have arguments and express real concerns, we create social good.”

Moving on to Englewood I want to highlight the **Southside Occupational Academy**, one of Chicago's hidden gems. Their principal, Josh Long, is with us today. Southside Occupational Academy is an education and training center for young people with disabilities, aged 16 to 22. The classrooms at the academy are actually simulated work sites – a grocery store, a retail shop, an office – where students can learn job skills in a hands-on setting.

It's a robust program, and the school's leadership saw an opportunity to make it even more impactful: what if the Academy could build partnerships with businesses that could result in internships or even employment for the students?

The school teamed up with Karen Tamley, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for Persons with Disabilities, to host an *On the Table* that drew 20 businesses to the Academy for a tour and conversation. By using the *On the Table* platform, Southside Occupational Academy was able to widen its network and begin to build lasting relationships that can make a real difference in the lives of its students.

This is the work of repairing the fraying networks of social capital: one leader, one institution at a time.

Last year I spoke about the courageous school leaders and parents fighting for the merger of Ogden International School of Chicago – a thriving, predominantly white and affluent school – with Jenner Academy of the Arts – an under-enrolled, 100% African American and low income school in Cabrini Green.

Recently, CPS announced that the Ogden-Jenner merger has been approved and will move forward. Much to my delight, I learned that the students at **Lincoln Park High School** are eager to help make this merger successful.

These students are participants in WE Schools – a program that inspires young people to nurture their sense of compassion and commit to being positive forces for good in their

communities. At an *On the Table* conversation hosted in partnership with WE, the students at Lincoln Park expressed their frustration with the prevailing stigma associated with a school so close to their neighborhood. These students know that change starts with them, so they have proposed the idea of creating a sister school relationship with the soon-to-be-merged Jenner-Ogden School.

I am especially pleased with how *On the Table* is contributing to solve one of the greatest problems facing our city. From the first day he was appointed, Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson recognized the challenge to restore trust between police officers and residents. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Robin Robinson and Vanessa Westley and dozens of CAPS officers, CPD has embraced *On the Table* as one way to do just that.

Over the past 12 months, the **Chicago Police Department** has been holding *On the Table* conversations as a way of building deeper connections and trust with the communities it serves. This year for May 16, Superintendent Johnson directed every district to host a conversation with a focus on race and equity. The Trust partnered with CPD to ensure that every officer received facilitation training. As you can imagine, the prospect of hosting such a conversation was a daunting one. But the week after *On the Table*, we followed up with the officers to see how their conversations went. Even the ones who went into it with uncertain expectations said they found the experience to be profoundly meaningful and worthwhile. This is how *On the Table* can be a powerful tool to build bridges and create new narratives.

*On the Tables* can also provide an open forum for residents to speak truth to power.

As Winston Churchill once said: "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

In Washington Park, Cecilia Butler organized a table of residents who are nervously anticipating the development of the Obama Center to the east, and the seemingly ever-present University of Chicago adjacent to them.

Cecilia Butler is known to be outspoken and persistent, if not insistent. While many of the venues in which she speaks are charged with the emotions or politics that close our ears to others concerns, *On the Table* gives us a chance to really listen with sympathetic ears.

During the course of such a conversation we can put ourselves in the shoes of Washington Park residents and hear what they are really feeling and experiencing.

Picture yourself as a 70-year-old resident renting an apartment in senior housing living off a very modest fixed income (that is never going to magically become more than it is). You read about these big plans, and you have 30, 40, 50 years of experience with other grandiose plans that did not improve your situation one bit. You still have no cleaners, no grocery store, no restaurant. And today your neighborhood feels even more unsafe than years past.

As one resident stated: “We can’t keep our kids here – it is too dangerous. I lost my niece.”

In this reality you are not invited to the table. To find answers you must piece together the truth from fragments of incomplete information. Public meetings are called “Sham Summits” because your voice hasn’t made a difference. You question, “What’s the point of me coming out because you won’t listen to me anyway?”

Your reality is summed up by the brutal truth expressed by one resident: “This is a mean world – I don’t trust the folks.”

But if you listen closely, what *On the Table* allows for is to glimpse the underlying anxiety, distrust and the pain of countless indignities. This is not about wanting a say in the architectural design of the Obama Center or its programming.

The real concern, as I heard it, is this. When the Obama Center is created and other investments are made by the University, rents will rise and land will become more



valuable. The landlord will have an incentive to sell the senior housing units for upscale housing.

And remember, you are a 70-year-old resident, living on fixed income in a neighborhood is where you have built your life. Where do you go? How do you even contemplate making a fresh start? Really?

And then let me share with you dialogue from the Table hosted at Saint Leonard's Ministries whose mission is to help those returning from prison to turn their lives around and become contributing members of our community.

Everyone I talked to said the same thing: "How can I give back to the community that I helped to destroy."

"We want to give back to the community, but we don't know how."

In many cases it's about basic things, things we may take for granted, but what if you never learned or experienced these things?

"What is your responsibility to a lease? I have never had a lease before."

"How do I be a good neighbor and respect my landlord?"

"I'm scared to walk down the street because they [the police] could say I am gang affiliated and put me back in jail."

In a similar vein: "Don't nobody have a plan to go back to the penitentiary."

But, "you need a good strong family to take you by the hand."

This is what Saint Leonard's is about: repairing broken lives returning to broken communities. Their work was best summed up by a volunteer who has been there 20 years, helping ladies with clothes and self-esteem. Her invitation: "Walk with me."

We all need Saint Leonard's to make our community whole, to heal our fellow community members, to reconnect them in a loving and dignified way.

In the face of discriminatory policies that have resulted in mass incarceration, we need many more Saint Leonard's houses, and Saint Leonard's should not have to struggle for funding from the state.

Which is where the table hosted by the Civic Federation comes in. They used their *On the Table* to engage civic partners to agree on a public statement demanding that our elected officials not come home from Springfield until they have passed a budget.

I also want to talk about our partners who have scaled their *On the Tables* by making it about their missions, their priorities to rebuild our communities. I am especially inspired by the leadership of Cardinal Cupich who has come out very publicly in his leadership of the 2.2 million Catholics in Cook and Lake Counties with a plan to engage all 345 parishes in his anti-violence initiative and Instruments of Peace Fund. What I find most powerful about his vision is his moral insistence that none of us can turn our backs on this violence. He intends to link his more affluent parishes with those serving our most distressed neighborhoods. His message: We all share a responsibility to act.

Which leads me to the Acting Up awards – how can we stimulate more follow-up, moving ideas to action? Last year when we tried this out we received nearly 400 proposals, made grants of \$1,000 to 72. It was ideas like a group of residents seeking to destigmatize mental health, or a sixth-grade class designing a coloring book to help adults more effectively counsel abused youth – led us to renew the program. This year teams of community reviewers are viewing \_\_\_ submissions and awards will be announced June 30.

Earlier in my remarks I referenced David Brooks' social commentaries that reflect on the state of our nation. Chicago's experience with social isolation, distrust, and decline in social capital are also playing out in other communities around the country. How do we know this? Well, one indicator is that 22 cities have adopted *On the Table*. Thanks to interest and funding by the Knight Foundation, 10 of the Knight cities are replicating this model. This speaks to our deep-seated need to form communities that are inclusive, caring, and work for everyone.

At a time when philanthropy is focused on metrics and measurable outcome, I am afraid that we dismiss things that matter, but are more difficult to measure: things like hopefulness, trust, dignity, caring.

Based on the experiences with *On the Table*, I am more and more convinced that civic engagement is a valuable outcome in and of itself. People coming together matters. People making their voices heard matters. The conversations that you shared together over lunch matter.

*On the Table* has become a civic institution in Chicago, our day to celebrate the practice of civic engagement. On this day, we schedule time to meet; and take time to listen. By coming together we come to understand each other and increase the empathy quotient in our city.

Conversations lead to commitments, and commitments lead to actions – actions benefiting each other and our common cause.

Not only does *On the Table* trend #1 during that day, but I am pretty sure that we were also trended #1 for kindness and caring.

I will let poet Gwendolyn Brooks, whose 100<sup>th</sup> birthday was last week, have the last word:

“We are each other’s harvest we are each other’s business we are each other’s magnitude and bond.”

Thank you for letting me share my experiences with *On the Table*.