

A Little Tech with that Philly Cheesesteak Sandwich?

POSTED BY [DAVE_SANDERS](#) / SEPTEMBER 26, 2013 / [2 COMMENTS](#)

Guest post by Dave Sanders, Managing Partner, WorldBridge Partners and SARTA Board Member

What a great 3-day study mission we had last week to the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia, aka PHL. Organized by the Sacramento Metro Chamber, 70+ Sacramentans descended on Philly September 17-20 to sample their secret sauce! And we're not just talking sandwiches—we're talking tech! At least that's the part of the study mission SARTA was most interested in. Sacramento's tech community was well-represented with SARTA CEO Meg Arnold; SARTA board members Mike Rizzo and myself; and Hacker Lab founder and CEO, Gina Lujan.

Ten years ago, Philadelphia faced some of the same challenges we face here in Sacramento. Loss of jobs, college graduates looking elsewhere for opportunities, and large companies on the decline or simply leaving the area. Crisis had hit the city and the region on many fronts, and things needed to change.

Ten years on, change is definitely in the air. Initially, safety and security, especially in the downtown core, were the main focus, and once that was handled, ambitions have expanded materially. We witnessed a strong collaborative effort on behalf of a broad segment of the region including business leaders, state & local governments, local universities (of which there are 100+ including University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University), nonprofits, entrepreneurs, developers, and investors.

We spent an entire afternoon in and around North 3rd Street — in the vernacular, “Nerd Street” (get it? N3rd St = Nerd St) — which is quickly becoming a haven for tech startups and emerging tech companies. Our afternoon included a tour of three dynamic organizations — one young startup ([Artisan](#), Bob Moul CEO), one tech “anchor tenant” ([Weblinc](#)), and one established-and-still-cutting-edge co-working space ([Indy Hall](#), Alex Hillman CEO). We heard from these guys and more during a panel discussion and then we adjourned to a free-flowing Beer-and-Geeks-in-PHL style mixer at the [National Mechanics Bar](#), downstairs from Weblinc, and described as the epicenter for tech-type after-work after-parties.

Some of the nuggets of wisdom we came away with:

- From Bob Moul — great insight into the need for self-pride and a strong sense of identity: “We don't want to be Silicon Valley. We want to be the best version of Philadelphia that we can.”

- From Bob and Alex — a strong commitment to the imperative of joint community effort motivated by the greater good, rather than by credit to any one person or organization: the idea of progress being “owned by none, but supported by all,” and the related idea of the need for communities to “co-create” themselves in order to be truly vibrant.
- From Alex — a great sentiment describing the forces that have shaped today’s young professionals: “the people that we thought would be there to take care of us, turned out to be unable to do that [due to the severity of the recession]. So we are taking care of each other.” He also pointed us to a [great video of a group of young men](#), on the way home from a pub in England, who came upon a bike rack. Far from vandalizing it as earlier generations (possibly mine) might have done, they worked together to fix it.

From discussions earlier in the same day, we heard about the interplay between the physical environment — including civic amenities such as [ambitious arts projects](#) and well-planned sports facilities — and a city’s culture and sense of identity.

Those on the trip returned home at midnight on Friday of last week with an enormous amount of energy and motivation despite the long days. By Monday of this week, there were already several follow-on projects and initiatives being discussed among participants. Expect to see and hear more about these as they gain momentum!

Bottom line take-away: together we need to JFDI*. And the emphasis in that sentence should be in both places — on the “together” and as well as on the “JFDI”!

*Need the definition of “JFDI”? Well, this is a public blog. As a hint, part of it is the Nike slogan – Just Do It. As for the “F” — I’m sure you can figure that one out.

**Want other perspectives on the Study Mission? Visit the [Downtown Sacramento Partnership](#), the [Sacramento Bee](#), and the [Sacramento Business Journal](#).